

Baptistic Theologies

Editorial Board

The Revd Dr Keith G Jones
The Revd Docent Dr Parush R Parushev
Dr Lina Andronovienė
The Revd Docent Dr Ivana Noble
Dr Tim Noble
The Revd Dr Ian M Randall

International Consultant Editors

Professor John H Y Briggs, Oxford University
Professor Otniel Bunaciu, Bucharest University
The Revd Dr Stephen R Holmes, St Andrew's University
The Revd Dr Craig A Evans, Acadia University
Dr Curtis Freeman, Duke University
Professor Nancey Murphy, Fuller Seminary

Publication – Twice each year

Editorial Office

International Baptist Theological Seminary
Nad Habrovkou 3, Jenerálka, Praha 6, CZ 164 00

ISSN 1803 – 618X

Publisher

Mezinárodní baptistický teologický seminář
Evropské baptistické federace, o.p.s.
Nad Habrovkou 3, 164 00 Praha 6, Česká Republika

This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database®* and it is also included in the full-text *ATLASerials® (ATLAS®)* collection. Both are products of the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606, E-mail: atla@atla.com, Website: <http://www.atla.com>.

Contents

Editorial	iv
 Tangible Church: Challenging the Apparitions of Docetism (I): The Ghost of Christmas Past Henk Bakker	 1
 Tangible Church: Challenging the Apparitions of Docetism (II): The Ghost of Christmas Present Henk Bakker	 18
 Tangible Church: Challenging the Apparitions of Docetism (III): The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come Henk Bakker	 36

Editorial

Attentive readers of our journal will have noted that it has on several occasions contained the texts of the two major lecture series sponsored in alternate years by IBTS, the Nordenhaug and Hughey Lectures. In this volume we are delighted and honoured to bring to you the texts of the Hughey Lectures delivered last November by Professor Henk Bakker.

There are several reasons to be glad for this opportunity. Reading the texts again was to be reminded of how thought-provoking (and indeed at times provocative) the lectures were. There may be material here which some readers will find they agree with and others find problematic. That is, we think, how it should be. A journal that only ever presented us with support for our beliefs would be no use at all, because very soon those beliefs would fossilise into idols.

In this regard we can recall one of the great figures of the Russian Orthodox exile in Western Europe after the Russian Revolution, the philosopher and writer Nikolai Berdyaev. Berdyaev was expelled from Russia in the early 1920s and eventually made his home in Paris, where among many other things he founded a journal, *Put'* ("The Way"). Berdyaev was the kind of person who was entirely capable of falling out with his own shadow, and was always having disagreements with people. And yet, he kept to the promise he made that he would publish anything that contributed to the dissemination of Russian thought in exile, whether he agreed with it or not. It is a striking example of someone who was wide open to the challenge of other thoughts different to his own.

This is something that we aim to do with *Baptistic Theologies*. The plural of our title is deliberate, recognising that to be truly "baptistic", there will be diversity and community. Gathering as disciples of the one Lord Jesus Christ, the same today, yesterday and always, we nevertheless bring our own experiences and questions, needs and hopes and joys to the task of articulating our faith and our mission. In these articles, Henk Bakker offers us a fascinating insight into one way of doing this.

It is also most appropriate that we publish these lectures by a dear friend and colleague of ours who is a Professor and holder of the Chair of Baptist History, Identity and Theology in the Free University of Amsterdam (or VU Amsterdam as it is also known in English). With our doctoral programme already embedded in the Free University, IBTS is taking a new step on its journey of service as a centre of research for European Baptists, and Henk has been already and will be a source of great assistance to us and we look forward to even closer cooperation with him

and our friends and colleagues at VU Amsterdam and at the Dutch Baptist Seminary.

The lectures remind us that the journey we are on at the moment will not be without suffering, but suffering for the glory of God's Kingdom and for the good of God's people. This journal and our sister journal, *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, will continue to present the diversity of baptistic theologising from Europe and beyond, giving witness to the faith and mission of believers' communities as they struggle with major questions of identity and belonging today.

We do not pretend to have all the answers, but as you will see in this number of our journals we are happy to publish suggestions as to where those answers might lie, and to walk always in faith, certain that we desire to follow where our God leads and that our God leads to life.

Tim Noble and Parush Parushev

Tangible Church

Challenging the Apparitions of Docetism (I): The Ghost of Christmas Past

Henk Bakker

First let me express my gratitude for the invitation to deliver the John David Hughey Memorial Lectures in this great Faculty, the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague. It is a pleasure and an honour. Secondly, as these series of lectures are in commemoration of the esteemed president of Rüşchlikon Seminary from 1960 until 1964, the scope of my address will be as broad as deep. Actually, Hughey was a prolific thinker, with a keen interest in almost all aspects of Baptist learning and living.¹ His was a scholarly mind displaying a fascinating combination of missional engagement, commitment to freedom of religion, study of language, and deep insight into the field of history and theology. Hence I aim to offer a deep approach to the notion of tangible church in these lectures. Tangibility versus apparition: it is this theological and ecclesial competition and contrast that our discussion will encompass over the course of these lectures. I begin in the first lecture by challenging the apparition of the ghost of Christmas past. I continue in the second part with a challenge to the apparition of the ghost of Christmas present. The concluding lecture will present a challenge to the apparition of the ghost of Christmas yet to come.² Let me start now by challenging the ghost of Christmas past.

Introduction

I will never forget my first steps on the thin ice of the field of New Testament research as a young student in the early 1980s. My hopes about the academic attainability of having the Early Church thoroughly traced and tied to the clear historical figure of Jesus were relatively high. But alas, these hopes were proven naive, and of course happily so, because the ancient Christian Church, right from the start, could not be classified as a monolithic unity. Early Christians shared a plurality of religious opinion.

Along with this rather soft academic initiation came a second one, which felt definitely less mild. The Jesus of the Church, in due course, turned out to become in many details just an apparition or a mental construction of contingent historical theological events. Yes, the ecclesial imagery of Jesus could even be disqualified as the product of sheer

¹ J.D. Hughey, *Die Baptisten: Lehre, Praxis und Geschichte* (Kassel: Oncken Verlag, 1959).

² Obviously the reference is to the designation of the famous three spirits presented by Charles Dickens in *A Christmas Carol*, 1843.

theological imagination, and hence be easily set aside. How could the risen Christ of the Church ever be recognized as the crucified Jesus? The angel at the tomb of Jesus said: “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen” (Mark 16:6). The one who was crucified is the one who has risen. The implications of the statement are far reaching. Most important seems to be the academic necessity of sound historical identification of the glorified Lord with the Jewish teacher and prophet from Nazareth who lost his life. Clearly the Church has failed to do this, and neglected and even disavowed the historical embeddedness of the life of Jesus the Jew.

Exemplary of the historic reproach is the scholarly legacy of the celebrated Professor Emeritus of Jewish Studies in the University of Oxford, Geza Vermes. Within thirty years Vermes wrote four highly relevant books about the religious identity of Jesus the Jew.³ In his fourth book, *The Changing Faces of Jesus* (2000), written shortly after the onset of the third millennium, Vermes closes with a sort of prophetic dream. Of course, in the visionary tale the dimensions of imagination and academic conviction are clearly interwoven, but nevertheless, the picture is quite telling.

In this dream the real Jesus (...) appeared as a middle-sized, middle-aged, dark-haired Jewish man, with strong arms, and the deep sun-tan of a Galilean from Ginnosar or Kfar Nahum. His visage radiated an admixture of wisdom, sympathy and steely determination. He had a resounding voice and his piercing eyes were shining. After two thousand years he came to explain himself and successively addressed Jews, Christians, religious drop-outs from synagogue and church, and men and women belonging to other faiths or to none.

“*Shalom*,” he saluted the Jews.

“*Forget the lies about me. I’m one of yours. Look, my religion is that of Moses and the prophets. I only lay extra emphasis on seeking the Lord our God who is one in and through all that we do to our fellow men in every single humble and love-filled deed of all our todays.*”⁴

More or less in these terms, the book holds Vermes’ critical manifesto – a compelling one, I should say – and if Vermes’ findings are to a large extent correct, the Church of all times and places is on the brink of either

³ Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew. A Historian’s Reading of the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973, 1981), *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (London: SCM Press, 1993), *The Changing Faces of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2000). See also by Vermes: *Jesus in his Jewish Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2004), *The Passion*, (London: Penguin, 2005), *Who’s Who in the Age of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2005), *The Nativity: History and Legend* (London: Penguin, 2006), *The Resurrection: History and Myth* (New York: Doubleday Books, 2008), *Searching for the Real Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 2010), *The Story of the Scrolls: The Miraculous Discovery and True Significance of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Penguin, 2010), *Jesus: Nativity - Passion – Resurrection* (London: Penguin, 2010), *Jesus in the Jewish World* (London: SCM Press, 2010), *Christian Beginnings from Nazareth to Nicaea, AD 30-325* (London: Allen Lane 2012).

⁴ Vermes, *The Changing Faces of Jesus*, p. 269.

collapsing into suffocating denial of the truth, or of entering an era of reinforcement of its very confessional heart, namely its witness to Christ.

Radical Hellenization

The very question I would like to address in this series of three lectures is in which way Christian churches have historically lost sight of their true witness to Jesus the Christ of Israel and how this has affected the advancement of Christian theology, so of course including Baptist theology also, and whether there is a way back, if it is deemed necessary. Put in academic wording, I would like to pose once more the issue of the Church's 'radical Hellenization', as the famous German scholar Adolf Harnack named the transgressing and globalizing tendency the early Church displayed. We have to acknowledge that Harnack's discussion about the so-called 'Hellenization of the primordial Christian message', after more than a century, is fully back on the teaching table of scholars of early Christian literature. Prof. Christoph Marksches, one of Europe's finest Patristic scholars, had the privilege of delivering the first Dutch Annual Lecture in Patristics on April 9th 2010, carrying the title *Does It Make Sense to Speak About a 'Hellenization of Christianity' in Antiquity?*⁵ In this address Marksches clearly affirms the continuing relevance of the exercise.

Passing by the precariousness of definition, 'Hellenization' however, means radical transformation of ancient Christian educational culture by means of Greek forms of life and thought.⁶ For Harnack powerful processes of radical Hellenization were vividly demonstrated in the fascinations of early Christian Gnostic systems, in which the very person of Jesus Christ was dissolved into imaginations and emanations of an illusive category. Gnostic fictions have no historical pretensions whatsoever and build their monumental mythological systems in the air.

Ignatius of Antioch (died c. AD 115), the martyr bishop of Antioch who had to deal with early Gnostic parties in several of the churches he wrote to, says that they "mingle Jesus Christ with themselves" (*Ad Tral.* 6,2). According to Ignatius they also denied Jesus' bodily suffering. His suffering, they say, "was only a semblance" (*Ad Tral.* 10,1: *to dokein peponthenai auton*). As a consequence, the historical Jesus was transformed into a phantom-like apparition, into a Hellenized semi-god, "mingled" with the mindset of a man. Docetism, therefore, may be characterized as a transforming and transparentizing religion, which

⁵ Christoph Marksches, *Does It Make Sense to Speak About a 'Hellenization of Christianity' in Antiquity?* (Dutch Lectures in Patristics 1, Centre of Patristic Research [CPO]; Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 1-29.

⁶ Marksches, *Does It Make Sense*, pp. 26 and 29.

deliberately detaches Jesus from his Jewish history in Israel. Gnostic as well as docetic patterns of thought have ever since bothered the historical theological manifestation of the Church. Baptist theology is hampered by it as well, as we will see. Divided into three sections I will make (1) a Patristic, (2) a hermeneutical, and (3) a historical theological investigation into Baptist backgrounds and see if there is evidence for ‘semblances’ of docetic apparitions.

(1) A Brief Patristic Approach: Philosophy of Estrangement

Only in the Gospel of Luke do we find the remarkable expression of Jesus that he was not a ghost: “Touch me and see, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39).⁷ Some would have thought that the person they saw and heard was just an apparition, a phantom (a sort of Lillith, cf. Mark 6:49). But Jesus brought their senses back to reality, to the tangible world. “Touch me and see” is the wording that made this happen. These words were the rope that saved the disciples from sliding away into the ditches and dungeons of their own scared imagination. “Touch me and see” were piercing and disenchanting words that helped the disciples cling to the facts of life. They did not have to believe in an empty silhouette of the Saviour, but could experientially engage with his flesh and bones, with his very body, which assured them of the absolute unity of reality, because the spiritual world is still also God’s created world. The spiritual world is not God, is not eternal and is not in any sense divine. Especially ghosts and all kinds of phantom-like apparitions – they all belong to the so-called ‘strong version’ of God’s creation. There is no ‘strong version’ of reality as opposed or contrasted to a supposed ‘light version’.⁸ Anything existing is ‘strong’, or else it is not at all.

Now concerning the person of Jesus the notions about the integrity of his corporeity differed widely among Christians. Some believed that Jesus was an angelic being, others supposed him to have suffered on the cross only seemingly and apparently (*dokein*), but not in reality, because God, some would say, could not suffer. Suffering is deemed to be not ‘God-like’ (fitting to God, *theoprepōs*). We can certainly say that early traces of docetism were overtly present in late New Testament times. Right from the start, we could say, the image of Jesus was being distorted by complexities of human imagination, ranging from fantasies from above to fantasies from below.

⁷ Cf. references to Luke 4:39 and I John 1:1-3 (both deal with early docetic influences) in the letter of Ignatius to the Church at Smyrna (*Sm.* 3,2), and in the letter of Polycarp to the Philipppians (*Phil.* 6,1).

⁸ ‘Strong version’ means ‘original.’ ‘Light’ means adapted and consequently less original (like Coca Cola light).

But why should anyone want to be a docetist? What would it bring? In order to answer this question we must try to enter the human mind and see what is there in terms of inclinations in a person's mind toward the estrangements of life. Docetism is all about the estrangement of life, the alienating perplexities of the self and the other, which make human beings think of life as a fate or a game or even a bad trick or a set-up.

The Church Father Hippolytus, in his "Refutation of all Heresies" accuses Marcion of docetism and of having borrowed almost all of his ideas from the pre-Socratic thinker Empedocles. Marcion the heretic was not really a disciple of Christ, Hippolytus says, "but of Empedocles, who was far anterior to himself and who framed and formed the same opinions, namely, that there are two causes of the universe, discord and friendship".⁹ And indeed, reading literary fragments of Empedocles, born in Sicily in the 5th century B.C., we do come across notions of eternal opposition and fatal necessity, which seem to haunt the human awareness of reality. Reality consists of four elements, four "roots",¹⁰ Empedocles asserts, earth, air, water and fire, which bare essentials are regulated by two basic forces, friendship and discord (*philotēs, neikē*). Friendship means love and concord. Discord means hate and enmity.¹¹ Friendship and love make the elements join together and share mutual life and joy and harmony. Discord, strife and enmity make the elements destroy their unity and 'flee from each other' (*hekasta phoreumena*).¹² Both movements of life, both eternal forces, dramatically turn life into what it is: a life of doubleness. Empedocles declares:

Twofold is the truth I shall speak; for at one time there grew to be one alone out of many, and at another time, however, it separated so that there were many out of the one. Twofold is the coming into being, twofold the passing away, of perishable things.¹³

Twofold is the truth, twofold is the coming into being, and twofold is the passing away. Reality, for Empedocles, is twofold in its flow of existence. Out of many grows one, and then, out of one, many come forward (*monon einai ek pleonōn ... pleon' ex henos einai*).¹⁴ Reality equals doubleness (German: "*Doppelpes*").¹⁵ Oneness, unity and coherence of life are

⁹ Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 7,17. Transl. J.H. MacMahon, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 5 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), p. 110.

¹⁰ Empedocles, *Fragments* 6(16): *tessara gar pantōn rhidzōmata prōton akoue*, in Empedokles, *Aarde, lucht, water en vuur* [transl. Rein Ferwerda] (Baskerville Serie; Amsterdam: Athenaeum-Polak & Van Genneep), p. 39.

¹¹ Empedocles, *Fragments* 17(24), 7-8. Cf. Empedokles, *Aarde, lucht, water en vuur*, pp. 42-43.

¹² Empedocles, *Fragments* 17(24), 8.

¹³ Empedocles, *Fragments* 17(24), 1-3.

¹⁴ Empedocles, *Fragments* 17(24), 1-2.

¹⁵ Cf. H. Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Rowohlts Klassiker der Literatur und der Wissenschaft; Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1957), p. 60: 'Ein Doppelpes will ich verkünden (...) Doppelt ist der sterblichen Dinge Entstehung, doppelt ist auch ihre Abnahme'.

persistently being divided and separated into multitudes of processes that cause fatal estrangement of the one. In fact: one is many and many equals one. Here we may detect the major element of the soul of old-fashioned dualism and Docetism alike. Normal life is scattered throughout and hopelessly lost in manifold estrangements from its source, and there is no cure.

Docetic image-forming of Jesus, for example, doubled the body into two modes of existence: a body of human flesh which the heavenly Son of God inhabited from his birth, and a spiritual body which cohabited the Son of God from the moment of his baptism in the Jordan River.¹⁶ This christological doubleness, according to docetists, was necessary because of the supposed impassibility of God. God could not simply take upon himself the shame and blame of estranged and corrupted life. So in order to hold on to God's coming to humanity and the divine integrity, Jesus was introduced as a double-sided person. The core of the matter was that Jesus' suffering in the Gospel was not genuine at all. It was a feigned and fake agony that troubled the Son of God, resulting in salvation for only half of the human being, that is, the purified soul, without bodily inferiorities. Again, according to docetists, Jesus did not really suffer and did not have to, in order to save the human soul.

Consequently, for docetists salvation could only be partially applied to human individuality, because the human being was not to be saved 'as one', at least not as a complete human being. In order to be saved, the person had to be divided into two human moral spaces: the moral sphere of light, the spiritual self, and the moral sphere of darkness, the bodily self. Christians were obliged to live by the principle of the doubled self, according to docetic faith.

As a consequence of this way of reasoning believers were inseminated with a fatal hermeneutic of distrust and suspicion, by which either the human mind or the human world or even God himself was torn apart, to be almost mathematically dissolved into two or more moral elements. Moreover, the most disturbing outcome of such dualistic enterprises was the presumptuous audacity of docetic Christianity, that it was able to trace down the marks of sin and evil, and pinpoint darkness by the finger. Docetic faith and the simple demonstrability of good and evil always went along very well. Docetists were, and still are pointing fingers people, persistently ready to divide the world in this way. Of course, Christians would have recognized good or evil when it happened, but

¹⁶ Cf. Hippolytus, *Refutatio omnium haeresium* 8,3. See also A. Van de Beek, *Jezus Kurios. De christologie als hart van de theologie* (Kampen: Kok, 1999, 3rd edition)], pp. 92-98.

docetists, indeed, sought to rise far above spiritual mediocrity, pretending to know both where evil was and exactly what it was.

Tertullian, in his famous treatise against Marcion, accuses Marcion of having an abnormal interest in the problem of evil. The uncontrolled curiosity (*curiositas*) in the enigma of the origin of evil (*unde malum*) turned the Christian Marcion into a dangerous heretic,¹⁷ who not only attacked and violated the divine image of the Creator, but also dared inflict damage on sacred Scripture. For that reason Tertullian calls Marcion a “Pontic mouse [or: rat] that gnawed away at the Gospels”.¹⁸ It seems that making distortions of the character of God/Jesus with docetists necessarily had to end up with constructing distortions of the Scriptures as well. Docetism is a philosophy of estrangement that will definitely affect the hermeneutical clarity of its adherents. Even in Scripture evil is carefully identified by docetists, and pointed to: “this is Christian and that is not”, “this is Jesus and that is not”, “this is the devil and that is God”. Docetists just seem to know.

(2) A Brief Hermeneutical Approach: One History

The major deviation of docetic heresy is its basic tendency to disrupt the unity of sacred Scripture. The Old Testament is simply portrayed as a book of promise, which is completely fulfilled in Jesus Christ and which is superseded by the voice of the Spirit in the Church. The Old Testament sees its story coming to an end in the coming of the Son of God and in the emergence of the body of Christ, the Church. Scripture, therefore, is merely a body of literature testifying about the joyful discontinuity of salvation history. By definition therefore, an Anabaptist hermeneutic, according to Stuart Murray, was “closer to the pole of discontinuity than to its opposite”.¹⁹ For this reason we also hear about accusations of Marcionism addressed to early Anabaptist leaders. In their effort to distinguish themselves from Reformed methods of reading Scripture, Anabaptists regularly overestimated the role of simply “listening to the Spirit”. The fact was, however, that “listening to the Spirit” in most cases led to a negligence of Old Testament salvation history and to the one-sidedness of theological perspectives. To be sure, Anabaptists came close to “jettisoning the Old Testament as a source of authority within their churches”.²⁰

¹⁷ Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* I 2,2: “For, like many even in our day, heretics in particular, Marcion had an unhealthy interest in the problem of evil—the origin of it [*unde malum*—and his perceptions were numbered by the very excess of his curiosity [*et obtunsis sensibus ipsa enormitate curiositatis*].”

¹⁸ Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* I 1,5: “What Pontic mouse is more corrosive than the man who has gnawed away the Gospels? [*Quis tam comesor mus Ponticus quam qui evangelia corrosit?*].”

¹⁹ Stuart Murray, *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition* (Studies in the Believers Church Tradition 3; Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2000), p. 119.

²⁰ Murray, *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition*, p. 120.

Nevertheless, salvation history, for leading Anabaptists of the 16th century, was considered to mean full participation in the history of Jesus by imitation. Only the *Imitatio Christi*, or *Nachfolge*, made Christians into real partakers of salvation history, which also meant partakers of “*Heilsgeschichte*”.²¹ But it is here, I think, that some inconsistencies become evident. Anabaptists as well as Baptists, according to James McClendon, read Scripture as living texts that create mystical identity between the story of the reader and the story of the writer. The bridging of the hermeneutical gap by mystical fusion of past and present is so distinctive and central in Baptist thinking that the phenomenon could even be tagged as the “baptist vision”.²² However, mystical union of stories past and present is not precisely what *Heilsgeschichte* is about.

Salvation history takes actual history as the central stage, the *decorum*, of God’s acts and words.²³ History is the factual framework of God’s acts of redemption and revelation. History is the very means of the purpose of life as set out by God.²⁴ Salvation history, therefore, is to be defined as the reciprocity of facts (*data bruta*) and words, especially prophetic speech, as enveloped in the story of things happening. Prophetic explanation, though, does not describe a better kind of history or a high or strong history as contrasted to a low history or light history. On the contrary, sound inner prophetic perspective grows out of the very fibres of solid historical reconstruction. Without history there is no revelation.

Historical identity, we know, is preserved and handed down by means of narrative, in other words by means of storied memory. People tell stories, that is they share narratives, for identification reasons. Storied memory, Paul Ricoeur says, combines two basic constructive hermeneutical orientations, which help the narrator almost ‘feel’ his or her way through the determinations of history on the one side, and the openness of the future on the other side. These two poles of interpreted life, kept in almost bipolar balance Ricoeur calls “*mêmeté*” (“sameness”,

²¹ See Olof de Vries, “Leer en praxis van de vroege dopers uitgelegd als theologie van de geschiedenis [Teaching and Institutions of the Early Anabaptists Interpreted As a Theology of History]” (diss. University of Utrecht, 1982), pp. 153-154.

²² See James Wm. McClendon, ‘The Baptist Vision’, Graduation Address at the Baptist Theological Seminary, Rüschlikon (Switzerland), 25 April 1985. Cf. James Wm. McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1: *Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 26-34, and *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2: *Doctrine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 34-46 (esp. 45). For a distinct hermeneutics based on a ‘baptist vision’, see Parush R Parushev, “Baptistic Convictional Hermeneutics,” in Helen Dare and Simon Woodman, eds., *The Plainly Revealed Word of God? Baptist Hermeneutics in Theory and Practice* (The Watson-Brown Foundation endowed Series in Baptist Studies; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2011), 172-190.

²³ Cf. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. 2 (London: SCM Press, 1975), 338, 358.

²⁴ Cf. Wolfhart Pannenberg (Herausgeber), *Offenbarung als Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), and Oscar Cullmann, *Heil als Geschichte* (Tübingen: J.C.B.Mohr, 1967). See also Oscar Cullmann, *Christus und die Zeit. Die urchristliche Zeit- und Geschichtsauffassung* (Zürich: Zollikon, 1946).

“*Gleichheit*”) and “*ipséité*” (“selfhood”, “*Selbstheit*”).²⁵ Identity is a construction of “sameness” and “selfhood”, of “*mêmeté*” and of “*ipséité*”. “Sameness” is sameness in time, “sameness” of reality, as it corresponds to the historical facts, to my name, my character, my *proprium*. “Selfhood”, however, makes one relate to these facts in one’s own way, so as to be no prisoner of ‘sameness’, but to be able to steer one’s own life freely to the purposes set.

If we apply these notions of narrative hermeneutical self-understanding to a docetic mindset, we notice a profound denial of “sameness” in favour of “selfhood”. The focus is being placed almost permanently on the sphere of discontinuity, on being myself, not on being the same. For example, if after a lengthy debate on hermeneutics, Justin Martyr’s discussion with his Jewish opponent Trypho has at last come to an end, Trypho, in utter perplexity puts Justin to the test with a final question, the most relevant question, I think: ‘What, then?’, says Trypho, ‘are you Israel?’²⁶ Happily enough, Justin is not a docetist, because he does not deny Israel’s history from God, but he truly considers the gentile Church to embody the new Israel, without taking part in the historical “sameness” of the people of Israel in any way at all. Of course Justin relates the gentile Christian “sameness” of Israel’s history to the person of Jesus,²⁷ but this is exactly where the real issue is situated. How same and self was Justin’s Jesus, and how same and self is ours?

(3) A Historical-Theological Approach: The De-Judaizing of Theology

A same-constructed interpretation and a self-constructed interpretation of Christian identity should go along very well. Both poles are to be discerned and connected, and not to be divided. Yet, for us as Baptists, the “same” side of the hermeneutic seems to be somehow problematic. In the first place, as a rule, most Baptist churches do not really engage with their Jewish ancestral chronicles. As a matter of fact, most Christians do not

²⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (L’Ordre Philosophique; Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1990), pp. 137-198. Cf. Boyd Blundell, *Paul Ricoeur Between Theology and Philosophy: Detour and Return* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), pp. 100-101; Ruud Ganzevoort, Jan Visser, *Zorg voor het verhaal. Achtergrond, methode en inhoud van pastorale begeleiding* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2008), pp. 111-112.

²⁶ Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 123,7: *Ti oun; phèsin ho Truphōn. Humeis Israèl este;*, in Miroslav Marcovich, *Iustini Martyris dialogus cum Tryphone* (Patristische Texte und Studien 47; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), p. 283. A. Cleveland Cox (ed.), ‘Justin, Dialogue With Trypho’, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994, First Edition 1885), p. 261.

²⁷ Cox (ed.), ‘Justin, Dialogue With Trypho’, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, p. 261: ‘As therefore from the one man Jacob, who was surnamed Israel, all your nation has been called Jacob and Israel; so we from Christ, who begat us unto God, like Jacob, and Israel, and Judah, and Joseph, and David, are called and are the true sons of God [*theou tekna alèthina kaloumetha kai esmen*, Marcovich, *Iustini Martyris dialogus cum Tryphone*, p. 284], and keep the commandments of Christ’.

know much about the history of the Jews, from the beginnings up till now. Hence Baptist Christians, in many ways, are just like other Christians. We do not look upon Jews as the first heirs and owners of the Church's spiritual Jewish heritage. Jesus himself explicitly stated that 'salvation is from the Jews' (John 4:22). Moreover, the apostle Paul affirmed the priority of the Jewish people in his day. Addressing the issue extensively in his letter to the Roman Church, Paul passionately declared:

They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises [*hai epaggeliai*]; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. (Romans 9:4-5).

As regards the gospel they are enemies of God, for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers [*agapètoi dia tous pateras*]. For the gifts [*charismata*] and the call [*klèsis*] of God are irrevocable [*ametamelèta*]. (Romans 11:28-29).

For Paul unbelieving Israel was never without God, never without its sonship, glory, covenants and promises. Even from the Gospel's perspective "hardened" Jews were still to be considered as "beloved" of God, objects of grace and glory for the sake of their forebears.²⁸ Especially gentile Christian circles of the Roman Church should keep this in mind, Paul thinks. For precisely gentiles are prone to underscore their "selfhood" interpretation of Jesus and the Church at the cost of the "sameness" interpretation, as explicitly stated by the apostle Paul. More of the "self" and less of the "same", in a hermeneutical sense, may ultimately result in presumptuous reversals of history, such as the daring premise of the downfall of Israel and the glorious rise of the Church in its place. Israel's history, blessings, and hardships are not the "fat calf" to be gladly absorbed by gentile Christianity when it finally found its way to the Father's house. If any absorption seems to be the case, somehow, then it is the other way around: Church history as the appendix of Jewish history.

The sad and simple absence of any *Israelica* whatsoever in much of modern Christian theology is paradigmatic of the way most Western churches since the downfall of the Jewish nation in the second century C.E. have communicated their superiority vis-à-vis the Jews. Jewish presence, Jewish texts, and the priority of Jewish history even after Christ, are generally disregarded and even ignored. Even more so, hermeneutically speaking an ongoing process of the de-Judaization of the Jewishness of Christian religion has held sway in Western churches and theological

²⁸ Cf. C.E.B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary On the Epistle to the Romans*, Vol. 2 (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1979), p. 459: 'The clear implication of this is that for Paul – and this must be stated with emphasis, since it has often be forgotten by Christians – unbelieving Israel is within the elect community, not outside it', and James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (WBC 38b; Dallas: Word Books, 1988), pp. 694-695.

circles, and has blinded many Christians so deeply that they take the turning away for granted.

Such fundamental negligence cannot but bring harm and imbalance to any theological framework under construction. I therefore fully concord with Ronald Diprose's remark on the seriousness of the effects. Diprose states: "Failure to reflect seriously on Israel in light of all the relevant biblical data has serious consequences for the entire enterprise of Christian theology."²⁹

If Diprose is right in his analysis, and I think he is, we may raise our eyebrows at encountering the same silence concerning Israel in contemporary Baptist theology. To be sure, James McClendon in his innovating *Systematic Theology* shows some interest in explaining the "sameness" ("mêmeté") and "selfhood" ("ipséité") of the Church in view of Israel's encompassing history with God. In his first volume, *Ethics* (2002), a few references are to be found to Israel's covenant with God, Israel's ethic of worship, grace and obedience, and the way in which the community of Jesus, the Church of Jews and gentiles, was engraved upon this specific form of prevenient grace. McClendon also has a paragraph on the Community of the Ten Commandments.³⁰ However, the bond between the Church and Israel is more or less a social one, a bond of traditions and practices for Christians to be brought under the guidance of Jesus and the Spirit. For McClendon salvation history, covenant, and the Israelite social bond coincide. *Heilsgeschichte* is God's social history with humankind, one that began and was first appointed within the people of Israel. Accordingly, in the second volume a key paragraph is reserved for the discussion of the Jewish rooting of Christianity.³¹ Here the important question is raised regarding the parting of the ways of Jews and Christians and the kind of community the Church wants to be.

What kind of community will make it impossible for believers in Jesus to be at the same time enemies of his brothers and sisters according to the flesh (Matt. 25:40)? What kind of community will reject the link with the state's coercion that led so many Christians into the maelstrom of violence? What kind of Christian community can reclaim its heritage from before the time when "the parting of the ways" denied the Jewish footing of Christian community? Christians have not yet adequately answered these questions.³²

While the main assumption of the assertion is true, Christianity has not yet found an answer to its almost judaeo-phobic character. The theological

²⁹ Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church: The Origins and Effects Of Replacement Theology* (Istituto Biblico Evangelico Italiano; Rome: Authentic Media, 2000), p. 171.

³⁰ McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, pp. 182-189.

³¹ McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2: *Doctrine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 345-361.

³² McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 2, 360.

debate has received little or no attention among contemporary Baptist or baptist(ic)³³ scholars.³⁴

However, the true question in my opinion is a different one. The true concern of our quest for docetic impediments is in fact not communally, socially or missionally oriented, but ecclesially. Ecclesial docetism is as wrong as christological docetism; and Baptist theologians, as a rule, manage to discern fairly well if Christology is at stake, but may at the same time be liable of allowing a strong flourishing of ecclesial docetism. We may hear a Baptist theologian confess that Jesus is truly God and human, and that Jesus is Israel's Messiah who truly suffered on the cross, while pretending that the Church right from its birth transcends the tight confinements of Israelite identity, and as a result has no commitments and obligations to fulfil towards the Jewish people, because the Christian Church is a body of free people, free from sin, free from law, and free from Jewishness.

However, because Baptist theology may tend to derail here, we have to return at the very beginnings of Baptist theology, its ecclesiology, to basics and specifically ask about the ecclesial minimum of Baptist churches. Exactly what makes a Baptist Church into a Baptist Church, and how much of historical theological "sameness" and "selfhood" of original identity is left in its spiritual DNA? Baptists often characterize themselves as a covenanting community, referring to the pledge that the ancient Smyth and Helwys congregation solemnly took in Gainsborough in the early 17th

³³ The terminology 'baptist' or 'baptistic' means belonging to the Free Church tradition and recognizing baptism on faith, see McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 17-34. For the origin and the use of the term 'baptistic,' see Lina Andronovienė and Parush R. Parushev, "Church, State, and Culture: On the Complexities of Post-soviet Evangelical Social Involvement," *Theological Reflections*, EAAA Journal of Theology, # 3 (2004), pp. 174-227; Rollin G. Grams and Parush R. Parushev, eds. *Towards an Understanding of European Baptist Identity: Listening to the Churches in Armenia, Bulgaria, Central Asia, Moldova, North Caucasus, Omsk and Poland* (Prague, CZ: IBTS Publisher, 2006), p. 10; Wesley Brown, Rollin Grams, Keith Jones, Parush Parushev and Peter Penner "Towards a 'baptistic' Contextual Theology," in Grams and Parushev, eds., *Towards an Understanding of European Baptist Identity* (Ibid.), pp. 175-81. For baptistic hermeneutical perspectivism consult with Parushev, "Baptistic Convictional Hermeneutics" and Parush R. Parushev, "Convictional Perspectivism: A Constructive Proposal for a Theological Response to Postmodern Conditions," in John Corrie and Cathy Ross, eds., *Mission in Context: Explorations inspired by Andrew Kirk* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 111-124.

³⁴ For example, see Nigel Wright, *Free Church, Free State: The Positive Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2005), pp. 1-23, Stanley Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), pp. 287-324 (esp. pp. 308-324), Stanley Grenz, *Theology For the Community of God* (Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1994), pp. 319-464 (esp. pp. 339-341, 354-382, 427-437), pp. 601-631 (esp. pp. 605-606), Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), pp. 1035-1036, pp. 1042-1049, end time scenarios on pp. 1205-1224, and Miroslav Volf, *Captive to the Word of God: Engaging the Scriptures For Contemporary Theological Reflection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 3-40. In all of these pages Wright as well as Grenz, Erickson, and Volf (as a baptist, though not as a Baptist), neither clarify the deep interconnectedness of the community of Jesus in its historical Jewish setting, nor explain Jesus' Jewishness in light of Old Testament expectation and New Testament consummation.

century.³⁵ From that moment on the so-called “discourse of belonging” has been of major importance for Baptist congregations.³⁶ Baptists share the covenanting principle with one another, as grounded in convictive communal life. This unique bonding vision may well be marked off as the founding stone of the whole fabric of our congregational system and theology, particularly of British and North American Baptists, and the communities planted by their missionary efforts.

Messianic Catholicity

If shared covenantal awareness does adequately depict baptistic hermeneutical self-understanding, as it spontaneously emerges from the presence of the Lord in the community of faith (Matthew 18:19-20), we have indeed come to the very core of the nucleus of Jesus’ community in New Testament times. For in Matthew 16 and 18 (both chapters touch upon ‘Church’ [*ekklèsia*]) we clearly perceive a covenanted minority of Jews, a ‘remnant’ (Hebr. *š’erîth*, Gr. [*hupo*]leimma) of followers of Jesus, secluded within the people of Israel, legally bonded to its Messiah as well as to its larger environment. The idea of ‘covenant’ is paramount to everything happening here, in the presence of Jesus the Jew. Living up to the old covenant, Jesus introduces his own pledge (“I will build my Church”), a new covenant established in communal recognition of Jesus’ Messiahship (“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God”). The liberating presence of the Messiah here evidently initiates a new sense of communal awareness and covenanting commitment.

Thus, the Christian Church may be basically portrayed as a thoroughly Messianic community, freshly regenerating within the body of Israel, reaching out for Jews and gentiles alike. And the spiritual “key” for unlocking the somehow reticent Israelite community is only to be found and discerned in the teachings of Jesus.³⁷ The entrance to Messianic fellowship then consists of wholehearted obedience to Jesus’ moral teachings, and strict compliance to the communal application of Messianic prescription. Hence, the close sequence of the imagery of “key” (“binding and loosing”) and “cross” (*imitatio* demonstrated in the attitude of forgiveness) in Matthew’s report.³⁸ The purpose of the picture is to have

³⁵ ‘I covenant with God and with one another, to walk in His ways, made known or to be made known to unto us, according to our best endeavours, whatsoever it shall cost us, the Lord assisting us’, J. Bakker, “John Smyth. De stichter van het Baptisme” (diss. University of Utrecht, 1964; Wageningen: Veenman & Zonen, z.j.), pp. 48-49.

³⁶ Cf. Darrell R. Jackson, “The Discourse of ‘Belonging’ and Baptist Church Membership in Contemporary Britain: Historical, Theological and Demotic Elements of a Post-Foundational Theological Proposal” (diss. Department of Theology, The University of Birmingham, 2009).

³⁷ Matthew chapters 16 and 18 both insert the ‘binding and loosing’ logion of Jesus.

³⁸ Cf. Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, Vol. 2: Mt 8-17 (EKK I/2; Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1990), pp. 459-466, 469, 471.

the *ekklèsia* of the Messiah direct, restore and unite weary Israel into a new intimacy with its God. The Messiah is the sole ‘comforter’ of the people of Israel, commissioning his newly covenanted community to reflect the moral space of love, forgiveness, and consolation.

It is my conviction that the community of Jesus, whenever and wherever, should always be known as a Messianic community devoted to wholeness and oneness of creation and life. Jesus’ main object was to reconcile the people of Israel and beyond to their Maker, and to have Israel become one flock again, Jews and gentiles alike, herded by one shepherd (John 10:16,³⁹ John 17:21-22⁴⁰). The apostle Paul too envisioned the people of Israel to be restored as one nation under the leadership of its Jewish Messiah. All Israel would be saved, Paul says, that is the Jewish people as a covenanted and a united people of God (Romans 11:26, *pas Israèl*). Here we find the Church’s “sameness” and “selfhood” combined in expressions of Messianic hope and expectation. For me, this is a solid ecclesial minimum, and I would refer to this basic orientation as the Church’s intrinsic commitment to Messianic catholicity, or more specifically, to covenanted Messianic catholicity (not Zionism). Covenanted Messianic catholicity belongs to the *esse* of the Church, to the fundamentals of the *notae ecclesiae* of Christianity, not just to the *bene esse* or to the *plene esse* of our shared communal interest.

A Church without this Jewish Messiah is a Church without a past, and hence a Church without historical spiritual identity and gestalt. Such a Church in my estimation should be typified as a docetic Church, a ghost Church, a community hanging in the air of shared creative imagination.

Jesus Christ is Israel’s Messiah, and because he is Israel’s, he is ours as well. The Church is not the legal heir of Judaism, as some Baptist theologians sometimes seem to hold.⁴¹ It is just the other way around. Gentile churches are part of Israel’s eternal heritage. The story of the gentile Church frankly comes only with the larger story of Israel’s presence on the planet. Any theology which defectively sets out to forget about Israel’s pre-given election, and with that the history of Jesus and the Church, will predominantly enhance the basic estrangement already interfering in the sincere and honest engagement and understanding of the major parties involved.

Docetic theology, we noticed before, basically works with a philosophy of estrangement. Reality as it is is suspected of losing its

³⁹ John 10:16, *mia poimnè, heis poimèn*, cf. Ezechiel 34:23; 37:17, 19, 22, 24.

⁴⁰ John 17:21-22, *hina pantes hen ôsin ... hina ôsin hen kathôs hèmeis hen*.

⁴¹ Cf. H.H. Rowly, *The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1955), pp. 78-82 (p. 78: ‘The Church believed it was the heir of Judaism’).

oneness, its coherence and unifying demeanour, bursting into multiple stories of light reality and strong reality. Pointing with the finger at Israel, Christian churches have as a rule made Jewish history sound like a light version of reality and revelation. Strong reality, they say, is safely kept and interpreted within the range of parameters neatly set by the tradition of the Church, and Jewish history is only interesting if it serves the cause of the Church.

A Double Whammy

For almost two thousand years it would seem that the hermeneutical self-understanding of mainstream Christian Churches in the West has been disturbed by a sort of ‘double whammy’: two bad things happening at the same time, the second even worse than the first. The first *malum* occurring was the Jews partially (for the greater part, it is true) rejecting Jesus; the second *malum* was the gentiles seeking Israel’s God, thinking they were the sole heirs. Both parties, I would say, suffered from serious neglect, even loss of reality. Both sides lived in docetic denial, refusing to acknowledge the rightful place of the other party in the course of salvation history.

If the bottom line of any well-considered ecclesial minimum is the Church’s covenantal Messianic catholicity, we may for the Old Testament aptly refer to the imagery of the suffering Servant in the prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 52:13-53:12).⁴² Here the gentile Church failed to recognize the sufferings of Israel laid upon the shoulders of the Servant as corporate personality on behalf of Israel.⁴³ The suffering Servant is *pars pro toto* and is, so to say, a catholic personality. However, the Jewish people generally failed to recognize that the dramatic picture of the suffering Servant could refer to a suffering Messiah who atones for the sin of his people.⁴⁴

⁴² Cf. Martin Hengel, ‘The Effective History of Isaiah 53 in the Pre-Christian Period’, in Bernd Janowski, Peter Stuhlmacher (eds.), *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 75-146, at 146: ‘Nevertheless, I believe we are not entirely without grounds for the hypothesis that already in the pre-Christian period, traditions about suffering and atoning eschatological messianic figures were available in Palestinian Judaism (...), and that Jesus and the Early Church *could* have known and appealed to them. This would explain how first Jesus himself and then his disciples after Easter could presuppose that their message of the vicarious atoning death of the Messiah ... would be understood among their Jewish contemporaries’.

⁴³ Cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1,55: ‘Ich erinnere mich, einmal in einer Diskussion mit Leuten, die bei den Juden als Weise gelten, mich auf diese Prophetien berufen zu haben. Dazu sagt der Jude, dies sei so über das ganze Volk prophezeit worden, als handle es sich um eine einzelne Person [*tauta pērophēteuesthai hōs peri henos tou holou laou*], denn es sei in die Zerstreuung geraten und zerschlagen worden, damit es infolge der Zerstreuung der Juden unter die übrigen Völker viele Proselyten gäbe [*hina polloi prosēlutoi genōntai tēi prophasei tou epēsparthai Ioudaious tois loipois ethnēsi*]’, in Michael Fiedrowicz, Claudia Barthold (eds.), *Origenes, Contra Celsum: Gegen Celsus*, Vol. 1 (Fontes Christiani 50/1; Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2011), 308-309.

⁴⁴ H. Wheeler Robinson, *The History of Israel: Its Facts and Factors* (Studies in Theology; London: Gerald Duckworth, 1964, 2nd edition here), 169-184.

In order to be able to effectively transcend the abomination of the ‘double whammy’, the Church should rather settle for a robust type of covenantal Messianic engagement, oriented towards a fully fledged Messianic catholicity, truly communicating the embodiment of God’s coming to Israel to comfort, to preach, to serve, and to suffer. Such a community indeed represents the best antidote against manifold deceptive forms of contemporary ecclesial docetism (as in my view dispensationalism and Christian Zionism are).

Baptist churches too, have to overcome their deep ecclesial estrangement from early covenantal Messianic catholicity. It is impossible to discuss ecumenical theology while passing over the Church’s inner hurt in failing to preserve its true ecclesial minimum. How could the Church be truly involved in new stories of ecumenism and catholicity, while bypassing the Jewishness of Jesus, the ever-suffering Messiah, and the horrific story of his Jewish people?⁴⁵

Expelling The Ghost of Christmas Past

As long as Christian churches run away from their responsibility to fervently fight ‘*akute Hellenisierung*’ (“acute hellenization” which is in truth ecclesial docetism) in its early and late tradition, in its confessional and ecumenical enterprises, the burden of the mistake is like feeding a heavy Moloch and carrying that Moloch everywhere with us. If churches do not wish to consider repentance from ecclesial Docetism, the Moloch will stay on our backs, dictating us by the finger. This is the ghost of Christmas past, which we have to expel.

The first step in the right direction is having the Church unilaterally postulate the fundamental equality of the revelatory importance of the Christian people and the Jewish people alike, as the Jewish Statement *Dabru emet* so profoundly exhibits in face of the complexity of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. *Dabru emet* was issued by the National Jewish Scholars Project⁴⁶ and was signed by over 220 rabbis and intellectuals from all branches of Judaism (though it was not claimed as representing any organisation or stream of Judaism).

⁴⁵ Cf. Ivana Noble, *Tracking God: An Ecumenical Fundamental Theology* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 45-64, 96-106, 144-162. Noble’s book is refreshing and constructive, but leaves out early Christian catholicity. More integrative is Scott Bader-Saye, *Church and Israel After Christendom: The Politics of Election* (Westview: Boulder, 1999).

⁴⁶ *Dabru emet* (‘Speak [the] Truth’), Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity, from the National Jewish Scholars Project. From the site http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dabru_Emet: ‘The Dabru Emet was first published on September 10th, 2000, in the New York Times, and has since been used in Jewish education programs across the U.S. While affirming that there are theological differences between these two religions, the purpose of Dabru Emet is to point out common ground and a legitimacy of Christianity, for non-Jews, from the Jewish perspective. It is not an official document of any of the Jewish denominations per se, but it is representative of what many Jews feel.’

Therefore, let us too pull back the pointed finger, and start thinking inclusively, in terms of an irrevocable Messianic catholicity. Let our theologizing be covenantal and catholic in the real sense of the word. Let our churches be tangible churches, endowed with Jesus's care and love for the dispersed, the poor, the wounded, and the repentant.⁴⁷ This is what Messianic community is all about.⁴⁸

Settling for a robust type of covenantal Messianic community leads us at least to five consequences:

1. Starting ecumenical initiatives with Jewish people (Christian or not);
2. Reading Scripture with Jewish people (Christian or not);
3. Doing good to Jews and Jewish Christians;
4. Knowing Jesus better through the 'lens' of Jewishness;
5. Communicating prophetic hope and non-violent Messianic expectation.

⁴⁷ Cf. Israel's famous prayer *Šemoné-‘esré* art. 5, 6, 8, 10, 14, 15.

⁴⁸ See Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, Matthew Black (eds.), *The History of the Jewish People In the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)*, Vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, Revised Edition 1979), pp. 530-537.

Tangible Church. Challenging the Apparitions of Docetism (II): The Ghost of Christmas Present

Henk Bakker

Introduction

In the preceding article I addressed the Christian inclination to de-Judaize and undervalue the suffering of Jesus the Jew. Already at the end of the first century the heresy became apparent in deviant Christian circles. 1 John 1:1 says ‘What we have heard, seen, beheld, and our hands handled,’ and 1 John 4:2-3 says ‘By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; and this is the spirit of the antichrist.’ A docetic Church becomes like its master, a phantom-like apparition: without weakness, without meekness, without tangible care, without love, a veritable monstrosity.

In these times of expanding secularism we need to return to the Nicene Jesus, the Jesus of early Constantinianism. However, I am aware that the early Constantinian “revival” is a controversial subject. Yet, I think we should pray for such a catholic renewal in our days. It is just over 1700 years since the world, as it was and looked like in ancient Church times, experienced a dramatic turn. On the 28th October in the year 312 at the so-called Milvian Bridge, bordering the old city of Rome, the young general Constantine defeated his rival Maxentius, and history was re-written and changed in one day. History was written, because the old regime of Diocletian and his successors was replaced by the rule of Constantine and his at the time still friendly ally Licinius. And history was changed, because the rule of Constantine would imply that the ideals of Christianity and tolerance would capture the world from that very moment on.

As a matter of course this historic and momentous event would forever be commemorated and celebrated throughout history. This has been especially the case in the past year as the 1700th anniversary of the Edict of Milan has been celebrated. The Constantinian ‘Wendepunkt’ (turning point) might well have been the first feeble breakthrough in history of such notions as religious tolerance and freedom of worship in matters of political rule. At the same time, I am well aware of the controversy the words ‘Constantinian turn’ brings up. This is something to be glad about, because controversy generally forces historical and literary research to continue and to deepen, expecting the results to speak for themselves. The Constantinian era happens to be covered and clouded by old-fashioned allegations and

prejudices. Let us see how some fresh conclusions and corrections restyle the picture of the early legacy of Constantine, and how this legacy at first started out to defy the tenets of docetism.¹

First I will offer a short reconstruction of the main historical facts, so as to be able to see the outline of the total picture. From there I will briefly enter the Nicean issue and raise questions as to our ways of thinking.

Reconstruction

With the Diocletian persecutions in the early years of the fourth century a period of great peace (*Longa Pax* as it was called) came to an end. After the Decian and Valerian persecutions in the fifties of the third century, Christianity throughout the Mediterranean world enjoyed almost half a century of great safety and prosperity. The sudden change of mind and attitude of the emperor Diocletian towards Christians seems almost inexplicable, and came like a bolt from the blue. Diocletian's palace in Nicomedia had Christians at its court, and even some of the court dignitaries were considered Christians. At close distance from the palace stood a sober church building where local Christians were accustomed to assemble.

Yet, a series of repressive measures were taken by the emperor in order to force the Christian populace back into its social margins. Diocletian's main objective was no less than complete restoration of Rome's ancient ethos and religion. His reform politics were Jupiter and

¹ Cf. H.A. Drake, 'The Impact Of Constantine On Christianity', in: Noel Lenski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Revised Edition 2012), pp. 111-136, Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (New York, 2010), Olivier Hekster, Corjo Jansen (eds.), *Constantijn de Grote. Traditie en verandering* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2012), O. Hesse, J. Van Oort (eds.), *Christentum und Politik in der Alten Kirche* (Studien der Patristischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft 8; 2009), Alexander Demandt, Josef Engemann (eds.), *Imperator Caesar Flavius Constantinus, Konstantin der Grosse* (Mainz am Rhein: Verlag Philipp von Zabern, 2007), Karl-Heinz Ohlig, 'Strukturelle Auswirkungen der Konstantinischen Wende auf das Christentum', in: Klaus M. Girardet (ed.), *Kaiser Konstantin der Grosse. Historische Leistung und Rezeption in Europa* (Bonn: Verlag Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, 2007), pp. 75-86, Elisabeth Herrmann-Otto, *Konstantin der Große* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2007), Fik Meijer, *Vreemd volk, integratie en discriminatie in de Griekse en Romeinse wereld* (Amsterdam: Polak & Van Gennep, 2007), Karen Piepenbrink, *Konstantin der Große und seine Zeit* (Geschichte Kompakt – Antike; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002), H.A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: the Politics of Intolerance* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), Bruno Bleckmann, *Konstantin der Große* (Rowohlts Monographien; Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2007, 5th edition), Timothy D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), G.J. van der Heide, *Christendom en politiek in de tijd van Keizer Constantijn de Grote* (Kampen: Kok, 1979), J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, *Constantijn de Grote* (Mededelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, NR 38/6; Amsterdam: B.V. Noord-Hollandse Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1975), H. Kraft (ed.), *Konstantin der Grosse* (Darmstadt: MacMullen, 1974), H. Kraft, *Kaiser Konstantins religiöse Entwicklung* (Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 20; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1955), H. Berkhof, *De kerk en de keizer. Een studie over het ontstaan van de Byzantinische en de theocratische staatsgedachte in de vierde eeuw* (Amsterdam: Uitgeversmaatschappij "Holland", 1946).

Hercules oriented, and just could not tolerate Christians standing in the way.² Therefore in the years 303 and 304 the Christian faith was gradually frustrated and obstructed by four decrees.³ In the end all Christians were forced to offer to Roman idols. Never before had the trial and persecution of the Christian church been so vast, gruesome and severe. Never before, primarily in the East, were the lives of Christian men and women so horribly tested and disrupted.

As in most similar cases in history, the basic incentives for religious reform were not really delivered by piety or devotion, but by commerce and power.⁴ Rome's power and wealth were, in fact, on the brink of collapsing,⁵ when Diocletian set out for a restoration of Rome's old nimbus. Peace for Rome (*pax Romana*) could only be warranted, if peace with the gods was warranted and restored (*pax deorum*). The domains of politics, religion, imperial cult and personal flourishing were highly interrelated and could not practically be discerned or separated. Consequently, theology in early Christianity would always imply political theology, discussing God's civil business with humanity.⁶ In Roman thinking cult and culture – the world of gods and the world of humankind – were tightly interconnected and highly balanced. Balance, equilibrium, was essential to stoic thinking. As a matter of fact gods only gave, if they were given to (*do ut des*). Nothing just for nothing, and only something for something (*quid pro quo*). Hence Diocletian's rigid demeanour in brutally executing his reform program. Divine urgency could be seen as the basic fuel of the emperor's fiery haste and dark ruthlessness. The emperor even claimed divine splendour for himself.

Yet generally speaking, the natural Roman mentality was quite open and tolerant toward strangers and strange ideas,⁷ as long as new cults did not endanger Rome's loyalty toward its own gods. Emperors tended to turn to conservatism when the empire's greatness was under attack or when Rome's honour and status was about to be disgraced or defeated. Exactly

² At the beginning of the 4th century, the Roman empire probably contained around 60 to 80 million citizens, of whom approximately 5 to 10% were Christians (minimum 3 million, maximum 8 million, which is definitely a much larger number than in the first half of the third century), See Pierre Trouillez, *Bevrijd en gebonden. De Kerk van Constantijn (4^e-5^e eeuw n.Chr.)* (Leuven: Davidsfonds, 2006), pp. 11-14.

³ See Eusebius, *HE* 8,2,4; 8,6,8. Cf. G.J.D. Aalders, *De grote vergissing. Kerk en staat in het begin van de vierde eeuw* (Kampen: Kok, 1979), pp. 69-79.

⁴ Wim Jurg, *De vierde eeuw of hoe het christendom staatsgodsdienst werd* (Budel: Damon, 2011), pp. 7-22.

⁵ Cf. Barry Gordon, *The Economic Problem in Biblical and Patristic Thought* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 9; Leiden: Brill, 1989), pp. 89-97, Piepenbrink, *Konstantin der Große und seine Zeit*, pp. 1-27, Demandt and Engemann (eds.), *Imperator Caesar Flavius Constantinus, Konstantin der Grosse*, pp. 46-67.

⁶ See Trouillez, *Bevrijd en gebonden*, pp. 16-17.

⁷ Fik Meijer, *Vreemd volk*, pp. 148-230.

this interest caused Diocletian, and about sixty years later also Julian the Apostate, to become what Bowersock labels as “puritan pagan”.⁸ Their inflexibility and puritan paganism were roused by economic motives, the need for social reform, and the flourishing frankness of the growing Christian population.

When Diocletian retreated and abdicated in 305 AD he and Maximian, both *Augusti* (East and West), were succeeded by Galerius in the East and Constantius in the West. However according to Eusebius, Constantius did not take part in the war against Christians (*tou te kath’ hemōn polemou mēdamōs epikoinōnēsas*).⁹ Moreover, when Constantius died the year after, his son Constantine was declared emperor by his troops in his headquarter at York in the far West (25th July 306). The young Constantine was raised in Nicomedia, at the court of Diocletian. He knew the imperial cult very well. Yet, he was not expected to become Caesar of the West when Diocletian and Maximian both abdicated.¹⁰ But then his soldiers chose him to be their *Augustus*. Galerius though, stilled the storm by making Constantine Caesar of the West, the helping hand of Severus, who did succeed Constantius as *Augustus*.

Thereupon a six year war broke out between successors (years of chaos and sheer complexity), legal ones and illegal ones, ending in three pivotal moments in early Christian history: (1) Galerius’ decree of tolerance of 30th April 311, (2) Constantine’s so-called conversion possibly around October 312, which brought him victory, and (3) Constantine’s and Licinius’ edict of Milan, issued in June 313.¹¹ All three historic occasions are worth focussing on for a moment. All three underscore the utter defencelessness of Christians and the great gift of freedom that was given to all inhabitants of the empire.

Galerius’s Decree and Constantine’s Conversion

It is still something of a mystery why Emperor Galerius openly revoked the measures which had been taken by Diocletian and Maximian against the Christians.¹² For sure, he was struck with a deadly disease, but the sickness probably would not have simply changed his mind about the serious deviations of Christianity. Eusebius briefly summarizes the content of the imperial decree: first Galerius openly confessed to the God of the universe, then he commanded without delay to cause persecutions against Christians

⁸ G.W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997, 5th edition), 79.

⁹ Eusebius, *HE* 8,13,12-13, in: Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 2 [transl. J.E.L. Oulton] (Loeb Classical Library 265; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932, repr. 1980), 301.

¹⁰ Galerius managed to install his proteges Severus (West) and Maximinus Daja (West).

¹¹ Piepenbrink, *Konstantin der Große und seine Zeit* (Geschichte Kompakt – Antike; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002), 33-50.

¹² Cf. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 15-27.

to cease, and finally Galerius decreed that Christians should be urged to rebuild their churches, to perform their accustomed rites and to offer prayers on the Emperor's behalf.¹³ Eusebius' first remark was not right. The other three were, though.

The imperial decree stated that former laws against Christians were of no use, because "the majority held to the same folly" (*tōn pollōn tēi autēi aponoiāi diamenontōn*). Therefore, Galerius deemed it better to grant Christians full indulgence. They were allowed to exist again (*hina authis ōsin Christianoi*), to rebuild houses in which they used to assemble, and to beseech their God for the common welfare.¹⁴

Within eighteen months of Galerius' declaration Eusebius and Lactantius assert that Caesar Constantine embraced Christianity. However, we are aware of the serious doubts historians have about the genuineness of this conversion. Still, there is no reason to question the authenticity of Constantine's deep sympathy for the Christian faith. The intriguing accounts by two of Constantine's contemporaries, Eusebius and Lactantius, may offer some clues to hold on to.

Both accounts, probably independent of each other, confirm the setting of the story: Constantine was at war with Maxentius and had to fight his ultimate fight; therefore Constantine needed a new protective battle *signum* to inspire his army with, a banner which was capable of overcoming the fright which the enemy would rouse in Constantine's camp. The sign that Constantine adopted and which was revealed to him (according to Lactantius in a dream, according to Eusebius in the sky during bright daylight) was the sign of the cross, the sign of Christ (*in hoc signo vinces*).¹⁵

Whatever its origins, the "heavenly sign" which Constantine ordered to be carried by the troops was a protective battle sign,¹⁶ a standard tightly connected to the *Sol Invictus* cult the emperor had been raised in during his early years (a solar monotheistic cult), and which was highly respected by his ancestors and educated friends. Constantine's nephew Justinian, the son of his half-brother Julius Constantius, would compose a hymn to King Helios in 362. Only fifty years after Constantine's conversion, emperor Justinian strove for the re-establishing of the *Sol Invictus* cult.¹⁷ Anyway,

¹³ Eusebius, HE 8,17,1.

¹⁴ Eusebius, HE 8,17,3-10, in: Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 2, pp. 316-321.

¹⁵ Cf. Aalders, *De grote vergissing*, pp. 87-95, and Jurg, *De vierde eeuw of hoe het christendom staatsgodsdienst werd*, pp. 39-42.

¹⁶ Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean World From the Second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine* (London: Penguin, 1986), p. 613: 'The invader needed divine protection, a god to "hold his hand" above him'.

¹⁷ Cf. G.J.D. Aalders, *Julianus de Afvallige* (Kampen: Kok, 1983), pp. 93-118.

Constantine's battle against Maxentius should not be depicted as a religious battle in any form whatsoever.¹⁸

Of course Constantine was not aware of all of the implications his outspoken sympathy for the Christian religion would bring about. And in addition to this, we should say that conversion from utter paganism to sheer Christianity took time, even for an educated emperor. Moreover, the Person of Christ and the Invincible Sun happened to have qualities in common which could have prepared and facilitated the shift from Sun of God to Son of God. Especially since Jesus was also addressed as the Light of the world, as the 'radiance of God's essence' (*apaugasma tēs hupostaseōs autou*, Hebrew 1:3). Finally, Christ and the Unconquerable Sun God were both venerated as personal and transcendent Gods who connect the spiritual world and the physical world. King Helios was a Mediator, just like Jesus.¹⁹ So we may assume Constantine, in his pagan mindset, was not altogether "unwired" for receiving the Christian vernacular and idiosyncrasy.

The Edict of Milan

Immediately after Constantine's victory at the Milvian Bridge, the new emperor convened with Licinius, his 'would be' ally in the East, about the necessity of a common policy and vision regarding the state of religion in the empire. Both rulers met in Milan, and drew up a momentous text concerning freedom of religion and faith. However the bond between East and West was weak, and lasted only for a couple of years. Still, the Edict of Milan remains a very powerful and impressive text. For now some samples will suffice.

When I Constantine Augustus and I Licinius Augustus had come under happy auspices to Milan (...) we resolved to make such decrees as should secure respect and reverence for the Deity; namely, to grant both to the Christians and to all the free choice of following whatever form of worship they pleased, to the intent that all the divine and heavenly power that be [*quicquid <est> divinitatis in sede caelesti*] might be favourable to us and all those living under our authority. Therefore with sound and most upright reasoning we resolved on this counsel: that authority be refused to no one whomsoever to follow and choose the observance or form of worship that Christians use, and that authority be granted to each one to give his mind to that form of worship which he deems suitable to himself, to the intent that the Divinity (...) may in all things afford us the wonted care and generosity (...) Which things we

¹⁸ Cf. Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, p. 612: 'His invasion was not a war of religion', and Bleckmann, *Konstantin der Große*, p. 66: 'Maxentius war kein Christenverfolger, und der Zug Konstantins hatte darum auch nicht den Character eines Religionskriegs.'

¹⁹ Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, pp. 79-93. In the spring of 362 Julian composed several philosophical essays from which his religious system is to be deduced. Cf. Rein Ferwerda (transl.), *Keizer Julianus en Saloustios. Over de wereld en haar goden* (Marginalia reeks; Budel: Damon, 2003), pp. 22-37, and Jurg, *De vierde eeuw of hoe het christendom staatsgodsdienst werd*, p. 41. Julian, however, taught and practiced magic, indicated as 'theurgy'.

have resolved (...) that thou mayest know²⁰ that we have granted to these same Christians free and unrestricted authority to observe their own form of worship. And when thou perceivest that this has been granted unrestrictedly to them by us, thy Devotedness will understand that authority has been given to others also, who wish to follow their own observance and form of worship – a thing clearly suited to the peacefulness of our times – so that each one may have authority to choose and observe whatever form he pleases. This has been done by us, to the intent that we should not seem to have detracted in any way from any rite or form of worship (...).²¹

To modern ears the text sounds like an early declaration on human rights. Especially three lines bring to mind how close the perspective of the decree of Milan comes to prescribing universal human rights regarding freedom of religion and worship.

- to grant (...) to all the free choice of following whatever form of worship they pleased
- that authority be granted to each one to give his mind to that form of worship which he deems suitable to himself
- that each one may have authority to choose and observe whatever form [of worship] he pleases

Every individual in the Empire was granted free choice of worship, of course within the boundaries set by the principle that was specifically put in parenthesis. If, as the Milan declaration says, freedom of worship was ‘a thing clearly suited to the peacefulness of our times’ (*tèi hèsuchiaì tōn hēmeterōn kairōn ginesthai phaneron estin*²²), the individual choice should clearly (*phaneron*) contribute to this sense of peace, to the *hèsuchia* of one’s own generation (*tōn hēmeterōn kairōn*).

Moreover, the Milan declaration has nothing really Christian about it. Licinius was definitely not a Christian, and even Constantine, though he would possibly have considered himself a Christian at that moment, had not yet done anything typically Christian as a ruler and a statesman. Constantine had condemned Maxentius to a *damnatio memoriae*. All reminiscences and reminders of the name of Maxentius had to be wiped off from history. Then the Emperor held two victorious and triumphant entries into the city of Rome (*triumphus*), standing in a chariot, with his face painted red, in the colours of Jupiter. He would be heralded, honoured, and celebrated as a god. The prisoners of war would be sold at the slave market and their combat commanders would be kept in prison on death row. Then Constantine would have climbed the Capitol Hill on foot, and would have

²⁰ Originally the text was composed in Milan as a norm of instructions sent to governors, which might be copied, with perhaps slight variations in detail.

²¹ Eusebius, *HE* 10,5,4-8, in: Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 2, pp. 446-449.

²² Eusebius, *HE* 10,5,8, in: Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 2, pp. 448-449.

attended the bloody offering to the god King Jupiter. Finally he would have entered the House of the Senate where he would have listened to laudatory speeches, to be concluded with an offering to the goddess Victoria and a special imperial speech to the Roman people. Moreover, for the Roman people Constantine was first and foremost a Roman emperor, not a Christian emperor. Besides, there were not so many Christians in Rome.

If we look at the decree of Galerius again, ordering persecutions against Christians to cease, urging Christians to restore their churches and rites, the declaration concludes with the request to offer prayers on behalf of the Emperor. These last words clearly display the average Roman predisposition toward new and strange deities. Strange gods should be respected if they do not disturb the imperial peace with the Roman gods. Interestingly, we detect the same concern and intentions in the edict of Milan. At least in three lines Constantine and Licinius seek to explain their intentions by referring to the goodwill of all divinity, which a good administrator of the empire can not afford losing:

- to the intent that all the divine and heavenly power that be might be favourable to us and all those living under our authority
- to the intent that the Divinity (...) may in all things afford us the wonted care and generosity
- this has been done by us, to the intent that we should not seem to have detracted in any way from any rite or form of worship

The expression ‘all the divine and heavenly power that be’ (*quicquid <est> divinitatis in sede caelesti*) is quite unique in Early Christian and late classical literature. The phrase may well reflect the change of mind that was taking place, not only in the heart of Constantine, but in the general atmosphere of society as well. Constantine like his father may have acknowledged a Supreme god, a Supreme divinity. The Edict of Milan can, therefore, be depicted as a full restoration of the common Roman sense of religious awe toward all forms of Deity, together representing the ultimate Divine. Under the Diocletian *cum suis* this awe and respect was side-tracked by a cruel and unfriendly fundamentalist narrow-mindedness.²³

Rome as of old was a city teeming with strangers and concomitant gods. In many respects the high-ranking nobility disapproved of such

²³ So, in fact Constantine restored much of common Roman societal legislation and idealism. The great change, his outspoken preference for Christianity, should not be isolated from major imperial perspectives, which were perfectly in line with normal historical developments in those days. Cf. Hekster and Jansen, *Constantijn de Grote*, pp. 46, 116, 131-133, 159-160.

openness and hospitality.²⁴ Still, as it seems, the city wished to welcome ‘all the divine and heavenly powers that be’. At least, such was the imperial order on behalf of the Roman people.

Misconceptions

If we look at the results of this short overview so far, we are entitled to say that Christianity itself was not the main cause or reason for Constantine to initiate the reform he accomplished. There are more important causes and reasons to be mentioned. In a recent article in the esteemed *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* H.A. Drake justly rectifies some of the misconceptions people hold concerning Constantine and Christianity. It is simply a mistake to think that Constantine’s foremost aim at his imperial rise was making the empire Christian, predominantly in a doctrinal way. It is also not true that Constantine should be portrayed as a ruler focused on doctrinal orthodoxy. On the other hand, Constantine did conceive of a “Christian public religion” that set a fairly low threshold for membership. Constantine developed a Christian “policy of broad inclusion”,²⁵ but not because he had experienced some sort of Luther-like conversion.

Constantine’s conversion story easily leads to the wrong conclusion that the Emperor right from the start submitted the empire to the power of the battered Church and to the logic of conversion, just because he had the power to do so, and that in the Edict of Milan religious tolerance is initiated as a Christian renewal. This is not the case. The Emperor Constantine was in permanent need of demonstrating his qualifications as a Christian ruler, and he had to find his way through an alarming diversity of weak and broken churches.²⁶ As Emperor Constantine was not a power player but a moderate ruler who tried to honour Christian tradition, and who strove for continuity and the unity of the Church. According to the Emperor Church peace guaranteed prosperity for the whole of the empire, and for the sake of church and nation Constantine was called to rule, not as a tyrant but as ‘co-servant’ of God (Lat. *famulus Dei*, Gr. *suntherapōn humōn*).²⁷

In the age of Constantine rulers knew very well that divine support was essential for success and prosperity in the world, and that rulers were responsible for gaining and maintaining that support. Moreover, the Roman Emperor was also the supreme priest of the Roman cult, *pontifex maximus*, responsible for the well-being of the state of society and religion. For this

²⁴ Cf. H.A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, pp. 245-250, Meijer, *Vreemd volk*, pp. 186, 218, 230, 248-264, and Jurg, *De vierde eeuw of hoe het christendom staatsgodsdienst werd*, p. 43. See for example Seneca, *Ad Helviam matrem de consolatione* 6, 2-3, Juvenalis, *Satiren* 6, 522-541, Tacitus, *Annales* 13, 54, 3-4.

²⁵ Drake, ‘The Impact Of Constantine On Christianity’, pp. 112-113.

²⁶ Drake, ‘The Impact Of Constantine On Christianity’, pp. 115-116.

²⁷ Bakhuizen van den Brink, *Constantijn de Grote*, pp. 25-27.

reason the Edict of Milan repudiates coercion as a means to achieve religious unity. Instead, diversity of belief was now to be the official imperial policy (*quicquid <est> divinitatis in sede caelesti*).²⁸ Support must be sought from all legitimate religions, and Christianity was now officially established as a *religio licita*. For Constantine Christianity formed the best of all religions, though, but he had also learned from Christianity that true belief cannot be coerced.²⁹

A New Millennium

So far I have looked at some of the latest research regarding the personality and early history of Constantine. The changes which the Emperor initiated were so vast and numerous that Christian churches sincerely thought that the Kingdom of God was at hand. Unfortunately, it took twelve more years before the eastern Empire was liberated. On 30th April 313 Maximinus Daja was defeated by his rival Licinius. Yet seven years later the liberator turned himself against the Christians. On 18th September 324 Constantine finally crushed Licinius's army, which made Constantine into the sole ruler of the vast empire in the East and in the West.³⁰

Within a period of twelve years, from the collapse of the Milvian Bridge to the defeat of Licinius, the Mediterranean world witnessed a turn around which it had not seen for ages. From this epoch on, the world would never be the same again. According to the well-known Christian Lactantius, a North African rhetorician who was converted to Christianity during his stay at the Diocletian court in Nicomedia, the dramatic change reflected the dawn of a new millennium, the times of ultimate promise of Old and New Testament together. Robin Lane Fox in his brilliant book *Pagans and Christians* says:

To the aging Lactantius, the Emperor's conversion had seemed to signify the dawn of the new millennium, a Virgilian Golden Age. Christian letters and speeches were distributed throughout the Empire, and Christian business became public business, visible in great synods, buildings and privileges of the new era.³¹

Lactantius was an influential scholar, though not one of the foremost. Lucius Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius (around 250-325) for sure was among the teachers of Constantine who educated the young convert in the doctrines and mysteries of Christianity. Lactantius had probably known Constantine from his stay at the court of Diocletian in Nicomedia. Here Constantine was raised as a teenager. Years later Lactantius would also become the personal teacher of Constantine's son Crispus. So on a personal

²⁸ See Peter Nissen, 'Constantijn en het christendom: zondeval of triomf?', in: Hekster and Jansen, *Constantijn de Grote*, 67-79.

²⁹ Drake, 'The Impact Of Constantine On Christianity', 121-122, 131-132.

³⁰ Cf. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 62-77.

³¹ Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 663.

level Lactantius may have transmitted much of his thinking to the imperial family. Though the beloved teacher, as he was called, died around 325, traces of his hand are not detectable in the Nicene discussion, nor in the aftermath of the debate.

Lactantius cannot be characterized as a speculative theologian, comparable to some of the other great North African Christian thinkers, men such as Origen, Tertullian, or Augustine. His was a mindset principally at the service of preaching and proclamation (*Glaubensverkündigung*).³² Moreover, he may also be characterized as a Christian rhetorician, a “Christian Cicero”, who did not so much criticize and rebuke pagan classical thinkers, as most Christian apologists did, but whose intention it was to synthesize the Christian legacy with classical thinking for the sake of communication of the Gospel.³³ Lactantius interpreted the Constantinian turn as the brooding-time of a new era. Accordingly Messianic times were forthcoming.

In his *Divinae Institutiones*, a sort of first Christian systematic theology, mainly written during the Diocletian persecutions, Lactantius later neatly interpolated several invocations of the emperor Constantine. In the seventh and last book, almost at the end, the Church Father writes:

All fictions have now, most holy emperor, been laid to rest, ever since God most high raised you up to restore the abode of justice and to protect the human race (...) The providence of the most high godhead has promoted you to supreme power so that you can in the trueness of your piety rescind the wicked decrees of others, correct error, provide the safety of men in your fatherly kindness, and finally remove from public life such evil men as God has ousted with his divine power and has put into your hands, so that all men should be clear what true majesty is (...) You, who defend his name and adore it, in the might of your virtue and prosperity enjoy your immortal glories in utter bliss (...) It was not wrong of the lord and ruler of the world to pick you out above all others through whom to re-inaugurate his holy religion, because you were the only one to demonstrate special qualities in virtue and holiness, and through them not just to equal but also, and most importantly, to surpass the glory of emperors of old (...) But you are the consummation of justice in your every act because of your inborn holiness of behaviour and your acknowledgement of truth and God. It was right therefore that in giving shape to the human race the godhead should make use of you as his advocate and minister. In our daily prayers we beg him first to guard you as his chosen guardian of the world and secondly to inspire in you a will to abide for ever in love of the divine name.³⁴

³²Karl Suso Frank, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Alten Kirche* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002, third edition), p. 202.

³³Eginhard Meijering, *Geschiedenis van het vroege Christendom. Van de jood Jezus van Nazareth tot de Romeinse keizer Constantijn* (Balans, 2004), pp. 374-375.

³⁴Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 7, 26, 10a.b.d.e.g, in: Anthony Bowen, Peter Garnsey (transl.), *Lactantius: Divine Institutes. Translated, with an Introduction and Notes* (Translated Texts for Historians 40; Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), pp. 439-440.

The tenor of the discourse matches the techniques of biased eulogy. Nevertheless, looking through the exaggeration of rhetoric the facts are clear for Lactantius, as for most of his Christians in his days. A new age has dawned. If I recapitulate Lactantius' findings, these are the essentials:

- justice was restored and the human race protected again
- safety could be granted
- wicked decrees were rescinded and errors corrected
- times of virtue and prosperity were at hand
- Christian religion was re-inaugurated

Justice, protection, safety, virtue, prosperity, condemnation of the wicked, religious revival, and tolerance regarding religious differences (as the Milan declaration prescribes): all of these notions portray vital conditions for normal human life, general legal conditions for every day life (nowadays defined as universal human rights). Still we could ask: what is millennial about all of this? However, we could also rephrase the question in the opposite direction: what is not millennial about all of this?³⁵

Millennialism (or chiliasm) displayed many faces in early Jewish Christian and in early gentile Christian literature.³⁶ Justin Martyr cherished chiliastic expectations, as did Tertullian, Irenaeus and many others. They all gathered their chiliastic indications from Old Testament and New Testament promises. The Scriptures promise a renewal of the earth, the restoration of justice and spiritual life for Israel and the nations.³⁷ The scope of the early Christian mindset was in terms of eschatology worldwide, planetary, and apocalyptic, and so naturally it was with Lactantius.

³⁵ Cf. Many mutilated *confessores* (Christians who confessed their faith and were therefore held captive) were released. According to Theodoret, the later Nicean conference 'looked like an assembled army of martyrs' (*HE* I, 6). Among the *confessores* at Nicea was also the Egyptian bishop Paphnutius, who was deprived of the right eye and the use of left leg (Sozomen, *HE* I, 10). Socrates Scholasticus, however, says Paphnutius, was exceedingly honoured by the emperor 'and often sent for him to the palace, and kissed the part where the eye had been torn out' (*HE* I, 11). The Nicean Council was not a conference of dull theologians, discussing matters which were highly speculative and abstract. These were Christians who barely made it through the persecutions, and who honoured Christ with their lives. Their life was a liturgy. Cf. Eusebius, *HE*, 8,12,10: 'it is now no longer possible to tell the incalculable number of those who had their right eye first cut out with a sword and then cauterized with fire, and the left foot rendered useless by the further application of branding irons to the joints', Eusebius, *HE*, 8, 14, 13: 'For the men endured fire and sword and nailings (...) cutting off and burning of limbs, stabbing and digging out of eyes, and mutilation of the whole body'. Cf. Eusebius, *HE*, 9,1,10-11; 10,3,2: 10,9,6-9.

³⁶ See O. Böcher, 'Chiliasmus I. Judentum und Neues Testament', TRE (7), 723-728, and G.G. Blum, 'Chiliasmus II. Alte Kirche', TRE (7), 729-735. Also consult basic historical theological handbooks and textbooks.

³⁷ Cf. the many planetary millennial promises in the books of Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea.

According to Lactantius the patriarch Noah was a just man who was ‘picked out’ by God to restore the world population. From him all nations emerged.³⁸ A so-called ‘golden state of humanity’ would be reached if all of humankind would obey the commandments of God. Moreover, this golden age is described by Lactantius as a time of restoration, peace and prosperity for the entire planet. The dawn of the new era was near, says the teacher, but this calculation was written years before the conversion of Constantine.³⁹ In due time of course he was convinced of the fact that the change had begun.

Noachic Renewal

The first promise for all of the earth in Scripture is given in the story about the covenant of Noah. Even the Hebrew word *b^erîth* (covenant) occurs for the first time here in Scripture (Genesis 6:18). Noah may be depicted as the godfather of all nations. The Noachic covenant guarantees God’s blessing and providence for the nations under the Noachic rules. According to Jewish tradition the gentile world received seven rules.⁴⁰ Now from a Biblical point of view chiliasm is only conceivable as the ultimate fulfilment of this first universal covenant of God with the world and all of creation, and with the gentile nations in particular.⁴¹

The Noachic covenant requires from the nations that they practice justice, and therefore install a government and punish wrongdoers. Paul’s words in Romans 13 clearly relate to the covenant of the rainbow. Moreover, the covenant of the rainbow seems to encompass all of Biblical

³⁸ See Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 2,13,1.8 (‘But in order to restore the population he picked out one man’ [*tamen ad multitudinem reparandum delegit unum*]; cf. Matt. 24:37-41; Luc. 17:26-35; 1 Pet. 3:20-21; 1 Clem. 9, 2-4; Augustine, *Com. in Ioan.* 9,11,1 [‘all living creatures ... to signify all the nations’]), in: Bowen, Garnsey, *Lactantius: Divine Institutes*, 158-159.

³⁹ Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones* 5,8,8-9; 7,24,9-15; 7,25,5-6; 7,26,4, in: Bowen, Garnsey, *Lactantius: Divine Institutes*, 296, 235-236, 237, and Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum* 1,2-4.

⁴⁰ Cf. Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham’s Promise; Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 188-201; Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *De misère van de theologie en de hoop op God* [Coen Wessel, ed.] (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 1988), pp. 114-124; Willem Zuidema, *En God sprak tot Noach en zijn zonen. Een joodse code voor niet-joden?* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1991), pp. 42-72. God’s coming (*Missio Dei*) to the world, to Israel, and to the gentiles, always means that he comes with a covenant. Coming implies covenant, because friendship with God (*amicitia Dei*) means living in agreement with God’s will.

⁴¹ Cf. Genesis 10:1-7, 32: ‘These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth; sons were born to them after the flood. The sons of Japheth: Gomer, Magog (...) Tubal, Meshech (...) The sons of Gomer: (...) Togar’mah (...) The sons of Ra’amah: Sheba and Dedan (...) and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood’; Ezechiel 38:1-6, 12: ‘Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Mesech and Tubal (...) Persia, Cush, and Pur are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all his horses; Beth-togar’mah from the uttermost parts of the north with his horses—many peoples are with you (...) Sheba and Dedan’; Revelation 20:7-8: ‘And when the thousand years are ended Satan will be loosed from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog’. Noah’s grandson was Magog, a name which returns in Ezechiel 38 (with more names from Noah’s direct posterity) and Revelation 20, the story of the millennium. Biblically, Noah and the millennium are clearly interrelated.

history, from Genesis 9:13 on (the bow and the covenant with the earth) to Revelation 4:3 and 10:1 (the bow round the throne and the bow upon the head of an angel standing on the sea and on the earth). All of God's history with humankind and creation is about justice and bringing justice to a world yearning for peace and righteousness. God cares for the nations, cares for universal justice, and cares for all of creation, wherever the rainbow colours may fall.

The Constantinian turn was received by Christians as a God-given breakthrough of justice. Justice was restored and safety was granted, from the East to the far West of the Empire. Henceforth, the Constantinian change could be interpreted as a Noachic restoration of basic values of life. Human dignity asked for new legislation, opening all kinds of possibilities for philanthropy and charity. Using McClendonian wording, the process of societal change was rooted in deep motives sustained by convictions of "radical Christian materialism".⁴² The Gospel should materialize into a new world, just as Jesus took on human life and lived the perfect life of the covenant.

Unfortunately, much of early Church theology has an inclination toward supersessionism (replacement theory). I deeply deplore these tenets. In rejecting Docetism at Nicea and Chalcedon, the Church should have retained its Jewish provenance and descent. By neglecting this, the most important warrant against Docetism was left void.

Conciliar Unity

I am aware of the many things that went wrong in religious political dealings soon after the Nicene council had taken place,⁴³ but the Constantinian turn did not start that way. On the contrary, it was a hopeful start of a whole new order. Even at Nicaea, the emperor was not set on displaying power and overruling the authority and competence of the churches. Constantine was confronted with two major controversies of Christendom in his empire, Donatism and Arianism. The first was never really dealt with, though Constantine took matters into his own hands and summoned a religious council (Arles, 314 AD). The convocation was a significant departure from the precedent tradition, with far-reaching consequences. For the first time, a Roman emperor had taken the initiative in convening a council of bishops. This action immediately elevated the status of a council and changed its nature drastically.⁴⁴

⁴² James McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. I, *Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdom Press, 2002, 2nd Edition), p. 97.

⁴³ H. Berkhof, *De kerk en de keizer. Een studie over het ontstaan van de Byzantinische en de theocratische staatsgedachte in de vierde eeuw* (Amsterdam: Uitgeversmaatschappij "Holland", 1946).

⁴⁴ Drake, 'The Impact Of Constantine On Christianity', pp. 116-118.

However, during these years Constantine learned to renounce force as a means to achieve religious conformity, though he came close to using it.⁴⁵ Only months after seizing the eastern empire and defeating Licinius in 324 AD, Constantine issued a letter to his new subjects urging toleration.

However let no one use what he has received by inner conviction as a means to harm his neighbour. What each had seen and understood, he must use, if possible, to help the other; but if that is impossible, the matter should be dropped. It is one thing to take on willingly the contest for immortality, quite another to enforce it with sanctions.⁴⁶

There is no reason to believe Constantine followed such a policy for any other reason than conviction.⁴⁷

However, the Arian controversy and Constantine's dealings with doctrinal division bothered the emperor more than anything. Not the issue itself – the *homoousios* debate was a “trivial matter” to the emperor and a “very silly question”⁴⁸ – but because of the role the emperor had in ensuring the goodwill of the Deity on behalf of the empire. For this reason regulating correct belief became the prime mission of the Christian ruler. All that was needed was “belief in a monotheistic Divine providence that guided human affairs”.⁴⁹ However, for the emperor, correct belief was not doctrinally oriented in the first place, but church oriented. The church of the Deity of the empire should be one church. There is only one God, as there are only one church, one emperor, and one empire, for the sake of the people.⁵⁰

Constantine vented his concern in a famous speech to a Christian assembly only a few months after the defeat of Licinius. The address is clearly an effort by the Emperor to demonstrate his good faith as a Christian ruler to all the clergy. Purely as a speech, the text is not so brilliant, but as a declaration of Christian intent, the content is very interesting, and deserves more study nowadays. In this text Constantine is remarkably clear about his intentions. Yes, he was committed to converting the Empire, but how? The Emperor stated explicitly that he would only deal with opponents “with the confidence of reason and magnanimity”, and we may take this characterization as a code for Constantine's own manner of proceeding. Constantine made unity, not purity, the goal of his dealings

⁴⁵ Drake, ‘The Impact Of Constantine On Christianity’, p. 119.

⁴⁶ Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 2,60,1. See Drake, ‘The Impact Of Constantine On Christianity’, p. 120.

⁴⁷ Five years later Constantine wrote to the bishops of Numidia, urging them to show Christian patience to the Donatists, Optatus, *App.* 10. See Drake, ‘The Impact Of Constantine On Christianity’, p. 121.

⁴⁸ Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 2. Constantine felt much sympathy for Arianism. The choice for *homoousios* was more a political and strategic one (to sideline Arius), than a convictional one. Soon after the Council of Nicaea Arianism won his heart. The emperor was even baptized, just before his death, by an Arian. Cf. Trouillez, *Bevrijd en gebonden*, pp. 55-96.

⁴⁹ See Drake, ‘The Impact Of Constantine On Christianity’, p. 124.

⁵⁰ Cf. Trouillez, *Bevrijd en gebonden*, p. 33, and Aalders, *De grote vergissing*, p. 111.

with the church.⁵¹ In the meantime, he was looking for Christians who were inclusive thinkers, who could support him in his search for consensus, and who were real “team players”. Constantine sought for harmony and moderation, not for victory and a rigorist approach.⁵²

Yet, Constantine tragically failed to bring unity to the church and to his empire. The reason for failure was, as Timothy Barnes observes, the deep division of the church, and the emperor’s interference in councils of bishops. Such interventions at councils gave its decisions the force of imperial law, which provincial governors were compelled to obey and observe. Constantine might have tried to impose unity by force, but he did not. Instead, ‘he recommended, exhorted, cajoled, and threatened – ultimately in vain.’⁵³ The Constantinian renewal set out to capture the world in unity and justice, but was frustrated by its own power. Early Constantinianism brought millennial catholicity only for the moment, but for the ages to come it failed to do so.

However, religious intolerance as we know it, was not brought in by conservative Roman spirits, nor by early Constantinian spirits, but by the spirit of early caesaropapism, which came to trouble the church soon after Constantine’s death on 22nd May 337. This caesaropapism, with its polymorphic form, was built on docetic presumptions. Either the caesar-pope was invested with powers that made him into a holy man, a sort of divine ‘hero’ (just as Arius made Jesus), or the caesar-pope was not really human after all, but an earthly reflection of an illusive monophysite Christ. However, both notions were highly docetic.

The Crisis of Christian Platonism

This brings us, finally, to the importance of the Nicene Creed. Patristic scholars have characterized the Nicene Creed as a “crisis of early Christian Platonism”,⁵⁴ because Arianism tended to make Jesus into a demi-god, a Platonic half-man, which was a docetic aberration. The Nicene neologism

⁵¹ *Oratio Constantini* 11,4. See Drake, ‘The Impact Of Constantine On Christianity’, pp. 125-130.

⁵² Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, pp. 250-257.

⁵³ See Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, pp. 208-244, here 244.

⁵⁴ See Marksches, *Does It Make Sense to Speak About a ‘Hellenization of Christianity’ in Antiquity?*, pp. 19-20, and Friedo Ricken, ‘Das Homoousios von Nikaia als Krisis des altchristlichen Platonismus’, in: Bernhard Welte (ed.), *Zur Frühgeschichte der Christologie. Ihre biblischen Anfänge und die Lehrformel von Nikaia* (Quaestiones Disputatae 51; Freiburg: Herder, 1970), pp. 74-99. See also Christoph Marksches, “Hellenisierung des Christentums”?—die ersten Konzilien’, in F.W. Graf, K. Wiegandt (eds.), *Die Anfänge des Christentums* (Forum für Verantwortung, Fischer Taschenbuch 18277; Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2009), pp. 397-436, and Karl-Heinz Ohlig, ‘Strukturelle Auswirkungen der Konstantinischen Wende auf das Christentum’, in: Klaus M. Girardet (ed.), *Kaiser Konstantin der Grosse* (Ohlig speaks negatively of the *Nicaenum* as ‘die endgültige, dogmatisch verbindliche Hellenisierung des Christentums’). Cf. E.P. Meijering, *Die Hellenisierung des Christentums im Urteil Adolf von Harnacks* (Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie voor Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, Nieuwe Reeks 128; Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1983).

homoousios testifies to the fact that in the advent of Jesus heaven really touched the earth. It took a true incarnation, not a docetic one, to lift creation up from its brokenness and downfall, in order to save and restore it.⁵⁵ Incarnation and creation depend on each other. With the Nicene focus on incarnation early Constantinianism comes close to bringing a Noachic revival, a restoration of humanity and human values, a short moment of millennial blessing.

However, Constantinianism was heavily criticized (among others by John Howard Yoder) for being a serious heretical aberration of the living church.⁵⁶ Constantinianism is not defined in terms of an evaluation of the person and the work of the emperor Constantine by Yoder, but in terms of an ecclesial and societal transformation beginning around 300 AD, and lasting for more than a hundred years, so to say: from the Edict of Milan to Augustine's City of God. The central nature of this change was "the identification of church and world in the mutual approval and support exchanged by Constantine and the bishops (...) The church does not preach ethics, judgment, repentance (...); it dispenses sacraments and holds society together".⁵⁷ The so-called 'Constantinian temptation' of the church was to ally itself to the powers that be, and to help the world achieve a peace and salvation that the cosmos was already heading to by itself.

Though I think this evaluation is for the most part right, Yoder fails to discern the covenantal Jewishness of the Constantinian turn. And somehow this is strange, because Yoder challenges Constantinianism so much because of its loss of New Testament faith as embedded in the history of Jesus the Jew.⁵⁸ For me, the Jewish quality of the Christian faith is preserved by recognition of its messianic catholic roots, not by making the mainly gentile church the focal point of history. Peace which is not

⁵⁵ See all about Athanasius' fight (in the East) and Hilarius' fight (in the West) with increasing Arianism in their days. See also about the Chalcedonian Council in 451 J. van Oort, J. Ronaldus (eds.), *Chalcedon: Geschichte und Aktualität* (Studien der Patristischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft 4; 1997), and A. Van de Beek, *Jezus Kurios. De Christologie als hart van de theologie* (Spreken over God 1,1; Kampen: Kok, 1998, 3rd edition), pp. 25-105. Very challenging is the criticism of the Anabaptist radical incarnation tradition regarding the Nicene and Chalcedonian Creeds. See Cornelis J. Dyck, 'The Christology of Dirk Philips', *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 31 (1957), pp. 147-155, Johannes Arnoldus Oosterbaan, 'Een doperse christologie', in: *Doordacht geloven. Verspreide geschriften* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2000), 155-170, Sjouke Voolstra, *Het Woord is vlees geworden. De Melchioritisch-Menniste incarnatieleer* (Kampen: Kok, 1982). Incarnation is so important to Mennonite thinking, that the Word became flesh without using a human venue (Maria). Chalcedon separated what should be kept together. Mennonites confess *totus Christus*. Jesus' humanity is as important as His deity, and they are one and the same (holistically).

⁵⁶ See for example John Howard Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1998), pp. 29-31, 54-64, 152-157, 195-1203, 242-261. Cf. Nigel G. Wright, *Disavowing Constantine: Mission, Church and the Social Order in the Theologies of John Howard Yoder and Jürgen Moltmann* (Paternoster Theological Monographs; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2000), pp. 14-17, 63-67.

⁵⁷ Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, p. 154.

⁵⁸ Yoder, *The Royal Priesthood*, p. 30. Cf. Nissen, 'Constantijn en het christendom: zondeval of triomf?', pp. 76-79. Nissen strongly nuances Yoder's findings.

dominantly church oriented or church based, is still peace, and may be a colourful beam of Noachic light thrown from heaven for the care of life.

If there ever was a so-called ‘downfall’ of the early Church, it was not here, halfway through the first half of the fourth century, but in the fifty years of ‘great peace’, during the second half of the third century. In these fifty years Christianity disseminated rapidly throughout the Mediterranean world, and in these years the numbers of Christian soldiers who entered the imperial army likewise increased.⁵⁹

Expelling the Ghost of Christmas Present

Baptist churches generally have little interest in Noachic theology. There is little awareness of binaries like creation and covenant, State and providence, nations and justice, humanity and tolerance. In a few churches prayer is offered for government and civil society, for ethical and social issues, for human rights, justice and tolerance. Most of our churches seem to be invisible and non-traceable in terms of civil involvement. Christians are simply too busy feeding their Molochs of individual salvation and happiness. Social invisibility turns a church into a docetic church, a ghost church, no matter how lovely its members may be.

The ghost of Christmas present can be expelled by being a tangible incarnational church, and by being a blessing for our social and civil environment. Baptist churches need to broaden their vision to encompass the horizons of the Noachic dimension. The covenant of Noah is eternal.

⁵⁹ See Adolf von Harnack, *Militia Christi. Die christliche Religion und der Soldatenstand in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963; Nachdruck 1905), p. 69, and G.J. van der Heide, *Christendom en politiek*, pp. 10-33.

Tangible Church Challenging the Apparitions of Docetism (III): The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come

Henk Bakker

Introduction

After discussing in the two previous articles anti-docetic conceptions such as Messianic catholicity, Noachic revival, and Nicene renewal, I will now rephrase major baptistic distinctives from their primary sources and earliest times. I start off with a well-known story.

It is the year 1569, not yet spring, so it is cold, and a young Christian Dirk Willems has to flee from the wrath of Dutch authorities. Dirk Willems was born in the city of Asperen, nearby Leerdam and the river Linge, only 12 miles south from Utrecht, the city shimmering in the centre of Holland. Some years before, Dirk was baptised according to the Mennonite faith. In 1536 the Friesian priest Menno Simons was converted by reading the Scripture, and was accordingly baptised. Ever since, Menno had been travelling as an ambassador of the Gospel ardently and tirelessly, baptising hundreds of new converts all across the Low Lands and upper Germany. Fortunately and amazingly, he managed to stay out of the hands of the Dutch authorities, and die in 1561, after serving the Lord Jesus devotedly and radically for 25 years. One of the converts of this vibrant Mennonite movement, also called Anabaptist, was Dirk Willems.

Because of Dirk's rejection of infant baptism and even baptising other young converts in his home, Dirk was subsequently condemned, persecuted and arrested by the Roman Catholic Church, and held in a residential palace turned into a prison. However, Dirk managed to escape using a rope made out of knotted rags. Using the rope he was able to climb out of the prison onto the frozen moat. Willems crossed the ice unto the 'Hondegat', at which point a guard noticed the escape and immediately started pursuing the prisoner. During his pursuit however, the guard fell through the thin ice, and evidently was at the point of drowning. Then, the story goes, Dirk Willems turned back to save the life of his pursuer, thus being recaptured and held until he was burned at the stake near his hometown on 16th May 1569.¹

¹ See John S. Oyer and Robert Kreider, Jan Luiken, *Mirror of the Martyrs: Stories of Courage, Inspiringly Retold, of 16th Century Anabaptists Who Gave Their Lives for Their Faith* (Intercourse: Good Books, 1990), 36-37. Cf. from an abridged version: 'Concerning his apprehension, it is stated by trustworthy persons, that when he fled he was hotly pursued by a thief-catcher, and as there had been some frost, the said Dirk Willems ran before him over the ice, getting across with considerable peril. The thief-catcher following him broke through, when Dirk Willems, perceiving that the former was in danger

Theologizing and Self-Definition

As I noted earlier for Constantinian times, martyr-stories like these have always been highly constitutive for the identity and theology of Christian communities all around the world, for early Christianity in its formative times, for radical Protestantism in the Reformation era, and for battered churches in our own time. In fact theologizing often starts here, where a group of people stand up against other human beings, saying ‘you should not be here’ (as in early Christian times: *non licet esse vos*),² and threatening to act violently if orders are not obeyed. Suppressed people generally react by defining themselves in telling stories about “why they are here” and “why it is so”. So martyr stories basically relate to the enigma of being as it is, life as ‘Da-sein’ and life as ‘So-sein’ (being there and being there as such). Why am I Baptist here, and why so? Stories of Baptist martyrs will tell me, just as “clouds of witnesses” told the original readers of the book of Hebrews (Hebrews 12:1).

Indeed, theologizing regularly starts as an exercise of biographical self-definition, because differences and discussions between people urge them to do so. Martyrocentric texts too were told in order to portray the martyr as a saintly conqueror who was vindicated in the eyes of God, and whose saintly demeanour also characterized the community he or she belonged to. Early Christian martyr texts were also early hagiographic texts. The Council of Nicaea (325) cannot be properly understood without interpreting its theology in the light of many martyr stories told by Christians everywhere around the Mediterranean world at the beginning of the fourth century.³

Likewise, the “clouds of witnesses” of 16th century Mennonite martyr stories as living communal texts evidently reflected, defined, and styled early Mennonite self-understanding. In effect, martyrs like Dirk Willems reflect a timeless wish for re-living the communal commemorative stories and images of this particular type of churches. The same holds true for early Baptist communities in the 17th century. Rhetorically speaking martyr-stories should be regarded as the narrative

of his life, quickly returned and aided him in getting out, and thus saved his life. The thief-catcher wanted to let him go, but the burgomaster very sternly called to him to consider his oath, and thus he was again seized by the thief catcher, and at said place, after severe imprisonment and great trials proceeding from the deceitful papists, put to death at the lingering fire by these bloodthirsty, ravening wolves, enduring it with great steadfastness, and confirming the genuine faith of the truth with his death and blood, as an instructive example to all pious Christians of this time, and to the everlasting disgrace of the tyrannous papists’, T. van Braght, *The Martyrs mirror* (Scottdale: Herald Press, 1972), 741. See the article of Mark Unruh at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dirk_Willems. Some inhabitants of present-day Asperen regard Dirk Willems as a folk hero, a Christian so compassionate that he risked recapture in order to save the life of his drowning pursuer. Recently Asperen named a street in Dirk’s honor.

² Tertullian, *Apol* 4,4: *non licet esse vos* (“your existence is illegal!”).

³ See note 82.

expression of an identity marking ‘fantasy-vision.’⁴ The word ‘fantasy’ does not denote mere dreams and unattainable fictions, but compositions of dramatic memories and expectations as constituent elements of self-interpretation in bitter circumstances. Communal fantasy-visions envelop collective secrets concerning reality, and shared ways of interpreting reality. Only the in-crowd, those who share the fantasy, understand its true meaning. The *moriturus* (the one who will die) knows *par excellence*. He or she who dies for the faith embodies everything the community stands for, everything the sincere and faithful long for.

The Praise of the Martyr

From the perspective of its rhetoric, fantasy-vision could technically be marked as an epideictic form of persuasion (ceremonial oratory), also called encomiastic (laudatory speech), demonstrative or panegyric (festivity speech).⁵ By means of praise and blame emotions are deliberately evoked in those who hear or read the stories (*ratio amplificandi/augendi*, and *ratio minuendi*).⁶ Martyrs are lauded because of their saintly character. Among the *dramatis personae* in the plot they are portrayed as holy men and holy women, who are able to defeat the scoundrels of the dark side. Hence, martyr-stories tend to rouse strong emotions in their hearers. By means of amplification, and a great deal of pathos,⁷ appeal is made to the audience’s value system,⁸ almost as if provoking the hearer’s approval of the martyr’s saintly status.⁹

⁴ See E.G. Bormann ‘Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality’, *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 58 (1972), pp. 396-407, ‘Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: Ten Years Later’, *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68 (1982), pp. 288-305, ‘A Fantasy Theme Analysis of the Television Coverage of the Hostage Release and the Reagan Inaugural’, *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 68 (1982), pp. 133-145, *The Force of Fantasy: Restoring the American Dream* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985).

⁵ Within the tradition of rhetoric, Aristotle’s three genres of (written and oral) discourse were taught for generations: legal (judicial), political (deliberative) and academic (epideictic), Aristotle, *Rh* 1,3,3; cf. *RhetHer* 1,2,2; Quintilian 3,4. On rhetoric as means of persuasion, see Aristotle, *Rh* 1,2,1355a, and 1356a: ‘There are three types of argument that can be made in discourse: that which is concerned with the character of the speaker, that which is concerned with the manner of bringing the listener in a mood, and that which is concerned with the discourse itself, because it wants to demonstrate [its point], or appears to demonstrate it’.

⁶ Both techniques were called *genera amplificationis*. Quintilian distinguishes between *amplificare* and *minuere* (8,4,1; 8,4,28), like Aristotle (*Rh* 2,18,4; 2,26,1). ‘Amplification’, or ‘embellishment’, or ‘Steigerung’ (Lausberg, *Handbuch*, § 259) characterizes the epideictic genre (*Rh* 2,18,4-5; Cicero, *De partitione oratoria* 15,52; 8,27), and was probably designed for the epideictic genre, see H. Caplan, *RhetHer*, 2,30,47, note b (p. 146). Concerning ‘blame’ and ‘honour’ see Aristotle, *Rh* 1,9,40-41; Quintilian 3,4,12 (*laus ac vituperatio*).

⁷ Aristotle, *Rh* 1,2,1356a. Cf. Lausberg, *Handbuch*, § 257,3 (“Das *movere* ... bewirkt eine ... seelische Erschütterung des Publikums im Sinne einer Parteinahme für die Partei des Redners”).

⁸ Cf. *RhetHer* 2,30,47.

⁹ Aristotle, *Rh* 1,3,4. George A. Kennedy translates: “for all speakers praise or blame in regard to existing qualities, but they often also make use of other things, both reminding [the audience] of the past and projecting the course of the future”, Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 48. In a note Kennedy states: “In practice, as in funeral orations, speakers usually

Moreover, laudatory speech invites hearers and spectators by anticipation to participate in the praise being distributed.¹⁰ They are more or less summoned to “step into” the world of the fantasy vision and live the tale. Fantasy vision and epideictic rhetoric are powerful convictive instruments. Yet, here major uncertainties occur. The foremost question of the genre is if the participant really is prepared to become a martyr himself. Other questions may be: will the community be strong enough to cope with the situation, will the story be known in its most important details, will the story be relived on a regular basis? Though epideictic discourse seems to be dealing with mere *certa* (certainties of the faith, to be lauded), *dubia* (uncertainties) are involved as well.¹¹

The uncertainties that martyr texts want to address are mainly concerned with (1) encouraging possible new *morituri*, (2) edifying the community, and (3) spreading the tale. These three formative notions, emerging also from Free Church roots, have been most constructive for early baptistic reflection and theology. It is my thesis that Baptist theology cannot properly be understood without a succinct martyrological prolegomenon.¹²

An Ideographical Approach

From its very beginnings the essentials of Baptist theology emerge from a rich fantasy vision indissolubly bound up with threatening situations in which early Baptist churches found themselves in England as well as on the continent. Looking for clues in the rhetoric the researcher is led to ideographical expressions. An ‘ideograph’ is a slogan-like formulation expressed in a single word or a phrase. The ideograph acts as a prism, directing the reader to images of remembrance and anticipation (the fantasy-vision). Studying ideographs provides steady access to the rhetorical vision, the pattern of thought expressed in idiosyncratic vernacular.¹³

praise past actions but with the intent of celebrating timeless virtues and inculcating them as models for the future” (ibid, 48, note 79).

¹⁰ Cf. *RhetHer* 1,5,8; 3,6,11; Aristotle, *Rh* 3,14,11. Kennedy translates: ‘In epideictic, however, one should make the hearer think he shares the praise, either himself or his family or his way of life or at least something of the sort’, *Aristotle, On Rhetoric*, 264.

¹¹ Cf. Lausberg, *Handbuch*, §§59, 60. See Aristotle, *Rh* 1,9,36-37, and Quintilian 3,7,28.

¹² McClendon also asserts the role of the story of saints and martyrs of Christian faith in passing on formative convictions to the next generation believers. See his *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology* (new edition, Philadelphia, PA: Trinity Press International, 1990; originally published in 1974).

¹³ Ideographs are ‘one-term sums of an orientation’, constructed from expressions belonging to everyday vocabulary, without rigid definition and with a high degree of abstraction. See M.C. McGee, “The ‘Ideograph’: a Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology”, *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980), pp. 1-16, here 7. Ideographs are not “discovered”, but appear, at a given moment, as culturally-related focal points for the values and expectations a sociologically distinguishable group (for example, at the

Reading baptist martyr stories (Baptist and Anabaptist) the ideographical vision they display is directed toward elements such as the end of time, cross-bearing, prayer for the enemy, and entering God's Kingdom. The epideictic character of the story is mainly concerned with the *certum* that God's Kingdom is near, and the *dubium* keeping a good conscience. I will accordingly take some examples from four historical theological sources: (1) John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (2) the *Martyr's Mirror*, (3) the *Ausbund*, a compilation of the oldest Anabaptist songs, and (4) the *London Confession*.

John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678)

In the year 1653 John Bunyan was baptized by immersion in the river Ouse (Bedford). Seven years later (1660) he was accused and convicted of heresy, and was imprisoned for twelve years. Three years after his release Bunyan was detained again for six months (1675). Throughout his captivity and ministry Bunyan remained a Baptist believer, even one of the most celebrated Particular Baptists. What was exceptional about John Bunyan was also that he would allow non-immersed believers to have membership in the church. Consequently he did not espouse an exclusivist Baptist ecclesiology, and refused to make an idol out of faith baptism.¹⁴

Shortly after these years in prison Bunyan published his book *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678),¹⁵ a breathtaking allegory about the Christian's life heading towards God and bliss. On his way to heaven the Christian is confronted with all sorts of attacks and seductions. The point is that there is no easy road to follow to the Kingdom of God. The road is safe, but not easy. Looking for ideographical rhetoric in *The Pilgrim's Progress* at least four leading motives are prominent: (1) end-time and Kingdom imminence, (2) suffering and attack, (3) testing and purification, (4) being brought to death and yet being alive.

When Pilgrim for the first time meets Evangelist, a parchment role is given to him. On the roll it is written: 'flee from the wrath to come', words which immediately push the man out of his comfort-zone, seeking a way out of impending judgment.¹⁶ From that moment on Christian is on his way

beginning of the 90's in the former USSR, the ideographs 'glasnost', 'perestroika' represented President Gorbachev's politics of reform, and 'yes we can' during Obama's campaign).

¹⁴ Cf. L. Russ Bush, Tom J. Nettles, *Baptists and the Bible: the Baptist Doctrines of Biblical Inspiration and Religious Authority in Historical Perspective* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), pp. 80-92; Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), pp. 65-72.

¹⁵ John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come* [1678] (Moody Classics: Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.).

¹⁶ 'Then he gave him a parchment roll, and there was written within, "flee from the wrath to come"' Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 8. Cf. p. 22: 'I come from the city of Destruction, but am going to Mount

to the City of Zion, the Kingdom of Heaven. So the very beginning of the quest opens with the 'entree' of God's Evangelist and parchment announcing the coming of God's Kingdom and wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:10). However, for believing the Word of God and for taking this new conviction as the leading theme of his life, Christian is mocked and threatened.¹⁷ Still, Christian knows that even tormented and battered Christians will be restored and glorified with God.¹⁸ They will be vindicated and rehabilitated.

Thereupon Pilgrim is reprimanded by Mr Worldly Wiseman. Christians needlessly take upon themselves many sorrows and perils of life Mr Worldly Wiseman asserts.¹⁹ Whereupon Interpreter explains to Pilgrim that the soul is cleansed by the grace of the Gospel like a floor is sprinkled and made clean with water,²⁰ and that therefore the soul should be tested. Thence Christian should come to the place where a cross and a sepulchre were found, and where the burden of Christian could be loosed off from his shoulders.²¹ This is what Pilgrim does. Subsequently he is severely tested by the demon Apollyon, who owns the country. The evil spirit says:

Consider again (...) what thou art like to meet with in the way that thou goest. Thou knowest that for the most part His servants come to an ill end because they are transgressors against me and my ways. How many of them have been put to shameful deaths!²²

Surviving the battle and coming out of the wilderness Christian and his co-pilgrim Faithful notice the city Vanity with its worldly fair, a town that every Christian must go through.²³ Mocked at and despised at Vanity Fair because of their saintly attitude, Faithful and Christian are arrested and brought to trial.²⁴

Even under these dire circumstances, Faithful and Christian do not hate their oppressors; they render blessings for injuries and good words for

Zion, that I may be delivered from the wrath to come', and p. 46: 'I am come from the city of Destruction, which is the place of all evil, and I am going to the city of Zion.'

¹⁷ Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 9, even called by Obstinate 'crazy-headed', 'brain-sick', and 'misled, fantastical fellow', pp. 10 and 12. Cf. 'they began to deride poor Christian behind his back', p. 15; 'greatly in derision', p. 54.

¹⁸ 'There is an endless kingdom to be inhabited, and everlasting life to be given us, that we may inhabit that kingdom for ever (...) there we shall see men that by the world were cut in pieces, burnt in flames, eaten of beasts, drowned in the seas, for the love they bare to the Lord of the place', Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, pp. 12-13. This is 'the world that comes next', p. 25.

¹⁹ Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 16: 'wearisomeness, painfulness, hunger, perils, nakedness, sword, lions, dragons, darkness, and (in a word) death, and what not.'

²⁰ Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 26.

²¹ Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 31.

²² Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 46.

²³ Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, pp. 79-80.

²⁴ 'They took them and beat them and besmeared them with dirt, and then put them into the cage, that they might be made a spectacle to all the men of the fair. There, therefore, they lay for some time, and were made the objects of any man's sport, or malice, or revenge (...)', Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 71.

bad words. Then these two pilgrims are brought before their examiners again and charged as being guilty of the late ‘hubbub’ that captured the fair. Thereupon they are beaten and chained, dragged up and down the fair, and finally locked up in stocks in a cage.²⁵ Faced with the jury, Faithful and Christian are condemned. However, only Faithful is killed. At the closure of the gory trial, right in the centre of this horrific moment, I believe the deepest nerve of the baptistic faith is to be detected. Therefore I quote this ending extensively.

Hang him, hang him! said Mr. Heady. A sorry scrub, said Mr. High-mind. My heart riseth against him, said Mr. Enmity. He is a rogue, said Mr. Liar. Hanging is too good for him, said Mr. Cruelty. Let us dispatch him out of the way, said Mr. Hate-light. Then said Mr. Implacable, Might I have all the world given me, I could not be reconciled to him; therefore let us forthwith bring him in guilty of death. And so they did. Therefore he was presently condemned to be had from the place where he was, to the place from whence he came, and there to be put to the most cruell death that could be invented. They therefore brought him out, to do with him according to their law. First they scourged him, then they buffeted him, and then they lanced his flesh with knives. After that they stoned him with stones; then they pricked him with their swords. Last of all, they burned him to ashes at the stake. Thus came Faithful to his end. Now I saw that there stood behind the multitude a chariot and a couple of horses waiting for Faithful, who (so soon as his adversaries had despatched him) was taken up into it, and straightway was carried up through the clouds with sound of trumpet, the nearest way to the Celestial Gate. But as for Christian, he had some respite, and was remanded back to prison; so he there remained for a space. But He who overrules all things, having the power of their rage in His own hand, so wrought it about, that Christian for that time escaped them, and went his way. And as he went, he sang, saying –

Well, Faithful, thou hast faithfully profest
Unto thy Lord, with whom thou shalt be blest,
When faithless ones, with all their vaine delights,
Are crying out under their hellish plights;
Sing, Faithful, sing, and let thy name survive,
For though they killed thee, thou art yet alive.²⁶

The hymnic words ‘Sing, Faithful, sing, and let thy name survive. For though they killed thee, thou art yet alive’ form the highpoint of the baptistic vision. These few lines cover the very core of the baptistic theological system. The confession sung forms a paradox: ‘though they killed thee, thou art yet alive.’ The martyr executed is yet alive. The closing words from Christian to his ally Faithful end with the unexpected.

The Martyr’s Mirror (1660)

Thieleman J. van Braght, the Dutch Mennonite pastor who compiled the famous *Martyr’s Mirror: Mirror of the Defenceless Christians* (1660),

²⁵ Bunyan, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, p. 72.

²⁶ Bunyan, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, pp. 76-77.

handed down a ‘memorial’ written by George Blaurock and Hans van der Reve just before they were burnt at the stake. In the memorial some of the aforementioned baptistic features are also found: end-time, cross bearing/suffering, prayer for the enemy, and entering God’s Kingdom.

The hour of the last day, to which we all must come, is at hand. Dear Lord, help us to bear the cross to the destined place, and turn Thyself to us with all grace, that we may commend our spirit into Thy hands. I sincerely pray Thee for all our enemies, O Lord, however many there may be; do not lay their sins to their charge; Lord, I entreat this according to Thy will. Acts 7:60. And thus we (I George Blaurock, and Hans van der Reve) will depart in peace. May the good God through grace lead us into His everlasting kingdom, as we firmly trust that He will, and finish His holy work in us and give us strength to the end, Amen.²⁷

Interestingly, the ideographs in this record clearly represent a living echo of Gospel verses²⁸ and seem to be oriented towards mimicking the story of Jesus. Moreover, the story of the baptistic martyr is strongly embedded in a replay of the story of Jesus as a living re-enactment of earliest Christian history. In some cases the martyr’s death is seen as a baptism in blood, an imitation of Jesus’ violent death in the closest way possible.²⁹

So far, we conclude from the above examples that early Baptist theology was to a great extent made up from storied confessions built around exemplary names of martyrs.³⁰ Along with these martyr stories go such central notions as: the end of time, carrying the cross, praying for forgiveness, keeping a good conscience, and entering the Kingdom of God. Early Baptist stories, with their semi-hagiographic purpose, seek to pass on these sketchy concepts to the next generations. Theology for the greater part consisted of a ‘live’ martyrology. Martyrs and saints represented the living embodiment of the full story of Jesus, and they were easy to identify with.

²⁷ Taken from T.J. Van Braght, *Martyr’s Mirror: Mirror of the Defenseless Christians* (1660).

²⁸ ‘The hour is at hand’ (John 2:4; 5:25; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 16:2, 32; 17:1; 1John 2:18; Rev. 14:7, 15), ‘into Thy hands we commend our spirit’ (Luc. 23:46), ‘I pray for our enemies, do not lay their sins to their charge’ (Mat. 5:44; Luc. 6:28; 23:34; Acts 7:60), ‘may God lead us into His everlasting Kingdom’ (2Tim. 4:18).

²⁹ ‘Are you able (...) to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?’ (Mark 10:38); ‘I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished!’ (Luke 12:50). Cf. Rollin Stely Armour, *Anabaptist Baptism: A Representative Study* (Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History 11; Eugene: Wipf & Stock 1966, repr. 1998), pp. 92-93, 135-142 (141: ‘they experienced the baptism of blood on two sides: the baptism of the mystics on the one side, and the baptism of the martyrs on the other’).

³⁰ “Anabaptist theology was shaped to a considerable degree by the experience of repression and persecution. This was especially true of their eschatology”, Walter Klaassen (ed.), *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primart Sources* (Classics of the Radical Reformation 3; Waterloo: Herald Press, 1981), p. 316. This statement is true of Anabaptist as well as Baptist theology.

The *Ausbund*³¹

Possibly the oldest collection of songs originating from early and later Reformation times the *Ausbund* reflects the Mennonite heritage more than treatises do. The hymnody of a community is its way of teaching convictions to the heart. Singing opens the heart and unfolds the deepest values and expressions of the Christian faith. Songs tell stories which powerfully help constructing the shared congregational identity. Christians sing their faith and celebrate the presence of the Lord Jesus amongst the faithful.³² Therefore songs are replete with verses and stanzas of liturgical ideographs, epideictic rhetoric, and fantasy vision.

In *Ausbund* songs and worship the church understands itself first and foremost as a suffering community, standing by the cross, and carrying the burden of being a follower of Jesus. Being a Christian means being a disciple who is prepared to die every day with Jesus.³³ Whosoever dies with Jesus, will rise again.³⁴ It is a privilege to be counted worthy to die a martyr's death for Jesus.³⁵

However, loving Jesus and obeying his commandments should have the highest priority for a Christian.³⁶ From there a disciple of Jesus is expected to love his enemies, neither to kill,³⁷ nor to hate, because Jesus never did ("Christus thut niemand hassen"³⁸ [Christ makes us hate nobody]). In most of the songs in the *Ausbund* the ideas of suffering

³¹ *Ausbund, das ist: etliche schöne christliche Lieder* (Lancaster: Joseph Ehrenfried, 1815). Cf. the fine article of Meego Remel, 'The *Ausbund* as a Source and Expression of Anabaptist Primary Theology and the Moral Sense of Virtue', in: Keith G. Jones, Parush R. Parushev, *Currents in Baptistic Theology of Worship Today* (Prague: International Baptist Theological Seminary of the European Baptist Federation, 2007), 143-180. On *Ausbund* as a normative source for baptistic primary theology, see Meego Rimmel, "Sense of Virtue in the Estonian Baptist Tradition" (diss. University of Wales via IBTS, Prague, 2011).

³² Cf. Lina Andronoviené, 'As Songs Turn into Life and Life into Songs: On the First-order Theology of Baptist Hymnody', in: Keith G. Jones, Parush R. Parushev, *Currents in Baptistic Theology of Worship Today* (Prague: International Baptist Theological Seminary of the European Baptist Federation, 2007), pp. 129-141.

³³ 'Als Christus mit sein'r wahren Lehr Versammlt hatt' ein kleines Heer, Sagt er daß jeder mit Gedult Ihm täglich's Creutz nachtragen solt' (Michael Sattler), 7. Lied 1.1-4, *Ausbund*, p. 46.

³⁴ 'Deßhalben jeder Christ hab acht, Dein's Herren Leiden stäts betracht, Und aller seiner Glieder. Du mußt auch unters Creutze stehn, Dein alter Mensch muß untergehn, Willt du erstahn herwieder', 3. Lied 34.1-6, *Ausbund*, p. 26.

³⁵ 'Es sey die höchste Freud geacht, Wenn Christus einen würdig macht, Von seinen Namens wegen Verfolgt zu werden und getödt, Daß er die Wahrheit hie gesteht, Erlang sein Reich und Segen. Ist doch sonst nichts dann Dürftigkeit Allhie in diesem Leben, Viel Trübsal, Elend, Angst und Leyd. Nach Christo soll'n wir streben, Mit ihm zu sterben allermeist, Und sagen drauf, In deine Händ Befehl ich dir Herr meinen Geist', 3. Lied 35.1-13, *Ausbund*, p. 27.

³⁶ 'Und sprach, Ihr liebe Jünger mein, Ihr sollet allzeit munter seyn, Auf Erden auch nichts lieben mehr, Dann mich und folgen meiner Lehr' (Michael Sattler), 7. Lied 2.1-4, *Ausbund*, pp. 46-47.

³⁷ 'Dann Christus die Seinen nicht lehrt, Daß man den, der sich nicht bekehrt, Soll fahen und todtschlagen. Er hat selbst niemand tödten lan, Noch also thun verklagen', 14. Lied 6.1-5, *Ausbund*, 78.

³⁸ 'Christus thut niemand hassen, Auch seine Diener nit, Bleiben auf rechter Strassen, Nach ihres Herren Tritt' (Felix Mantz), 6. Lied 14.1-4, *Ausbund*, p. 45.

(including imprisonment and death), cross bearing, and keeping a good conscience have pre-eminence.

The London Confession (1645)

The last document to be investigated in this brief series of four is the revised text of the London Confession, the Epistle Dedicatory and the noble conclusion attached to it. In the conclusion it is declared that London Strict Baptists endeavour “in all things to keep a good conscience, and to do unto every man (of what judgement soever) as we would they should do unto us, that as our practice is”.³⁹ It is also stated that if any man would impose on the community anything not to be commanded by the Lord Jesus, “we should in his strength, rather embrace all reproaches and tortures of men, to be stript of all outward comforts, and if it were possible, to die a thousand deaths, rather than to do anything against the least tittle of the truth of God, or against the light of our own consciences”.⁴⁰ Early Baptists confess that it is their “practice” to “keep a good conscience”, and “to do unto every man as we wish them to do unto us”.⁴¹

The London Confession, similarly to the *Pilgrim's Progress*, the *Martyr's Mirror*, and the *Ausbund*, univocally exhibits a pre-commitment of early Baptist believers to the preservation of a good conscience, whatever the costs, and to doing well to every other person according to the words of Jesus. Again, Baptist life is styled after the practices that Jesus taught. In fact, early Baptist theology may be aptly depicted as a narrative intertextual re-enactment of the history of Jesus. Theologizing comes close to replaying the story of Jesus, or the other way around: Jesus extends his own story in and through faithful communities of Kingdom followers.

Baptist Distinctives

In the closing paragraphs some Baptist distinctives will be discussed, as they have been found in the sources, processed in different theologies, and brought into discussion with contemporary research, especially in dialogue with Christological developments.

Baptist beginnings theologically circle around a set of communal distinctives. Three core values stand out in what we have examined so far: Kingdom imminence, suffering attack, and keeping a forgiving conscience. The wording shows that life is contested, because of its two-sidedness, its duality. Other central ideas, such as baptism and communal life, strictly follow from these, not vice-versa. God's persistent coming to humankind,

³⁹ William Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, revised edition 1969), p. 149.

⁴⁰ Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 149.

⁴¹ Cf. Mat. 7:12; Luc. 6:31, and Lev. 19:18.

the *Missio Dei* in creation, in Israel, in the prophets, in the Messiah, in the Holy Spirit, in the Church, and in the second coming, is highly recognized among early Baptists.

The coming of the Kingdom arouses rejection and animosity from human beings, even persecution. Hence early Baptists were often merely a suffering minority carrying their crosses in the footsteps of Jesus. Moreover, God's coming and human obedience result in an ethical lifestyle of permanent renewal of conscience by grace and forgiveness. Baptists believe that a new conscience touched by God's forgiveness in Christ is necessary in order to become the ethical man or woman who transforms into the image of Christ, and who is ready to forgive others, for example oppressors. Because of their strong faith and hope, many Baptists developed an orthopraxy of obedience and good conscience in hostile and uninviting surroundings.⁴²

It is from these facts of *Heilsgeschichte* (the coming of the Kingdom, attack and suffering, forgiveness and good conscience) that the baptismal sign and the bond of communal life arise. Accordingly Baptist theology should open with (1) God's Kingdom coming to the world, (2) followed by the story of the cross and suffering, (3) complemented by the gift of new conscience and new ethical awareness, and (4) concluded by discussing the locus of baptism and communal life.

Other Approaches

In contemporary theological discussion Baptists seldom give priority to Kingdom imminence, Christian suffering and a forgiving conscience.⁴³ Some opt for a convictional approach, pointing to five distinctive theological convictions emerging from local communal life as laboratories of primary theology:⁴⁴ (1) Bible reading as a specific practice of hermeneutical self-definition, (2) discipleship as living the new life of a follower of Christ, (3) a high view of communal commitment and nurturing responsibility (covenanting), (4) challenging and redeeming the worldly powers by interference, (5) missional presence and preaching. All five

⁴² See Keith G. Jones, 'Baptists and Anabaptists Revisited', in: Anthony R. Cross, Nicholas J. Wood (eds.), *Exploring Baptist Origins* (Centre For Baptist History and Heritage Studies, Vol. 1; Oxford: Regent Park College, 2010), pp. 139-155.

⁴³ Cf. Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology For the Community of God* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1994), Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center. Evangelical Theology In a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), Wright, *Free Church, Free State*, Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Studies in Baptist History and Thought 13; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003).

⁴⁴ See Ian M. Randall, 'Tracing Baptist Theological Footprints: A European Perspective', *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 36/2 (2009), pp. 133-148, and Curtis Freeman, *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 36/2 (2009), 149-155. Cf. Parush R. Parushev, 'Theologie op een baptistenmanier [Doing Theology in a Baptist Way]', in: Teun van der Leer (ed.), *Zo zijn onze manieren! In gesprek over gemeentetheologie* (Baptistica Reeks; Barneveld: Unie van Baptistengemeenten, 2009), pp. 7-22.

distinctives are true and certainly describe “doing local theology” as it is found in most of our Baptist communities. However, the issue is whether these five markers of Baptist identity are sufficiently distinctive of Baptist profile as delivered by earliest tradition.

James McClendon opens his *Systematic Theology* with ethics, body ethics and communal ethics. Ethics certainly is at the heart of Baptist theology.⁴⁵ After all, thinking truth implies doing truth. We cannot have theology without convictions and values conducting our lives. Sound theology moves into transformative ethics.⁴⁶ Moral life and confessing faith are one and the same, as our personal life and our social life are. Therefore McClendon correctly concentrates in his ethics on the “politics of forgiveness”.⁴⁷ As a matter of fact, forgiveness is the “best practice” of the Christian faith, its unique *raison d’être*, even its radical otherworldliness. According to Paul Christians should not steal, lie, curse or hate. To the Ephesians the apostle writes: “But you did not learn Christ in this way” (Ephesians 4:20: *humeis de ouch houtōs emathete ton Christon*). Baptists consider the church to be a powerful eschatological reality, “an embassy in this world of the other world to come”, and “a radically different world, in and out of time”.⁴⁸ However, this otherworldly expectation has sometimes been explained in an inner-worldly way, in a millennial and radical way.⁴⁹

However, I do not think we should start Baptist theology with exploring humanity or communal life, nor with expounding God’s character. Baptist theology should begin with telling the story of life. Theology is about life, about how reality behaves, and how the complexities of everyday life determine the lives and times of people. Therefore theology should open with exploring the many faces of life, the

⁴⁵ Cf. James Wm. McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1: *Ethics*, Vol. 2: *Doctrine*, Vol. 3: *Witness* (revised edition with a New Introduction by Curtis W. Freeman. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012, originally published by Abingdon Press, 1986 - 2002).

⁴⁶ In a series of recent works, Glen Stassen has made a praiseworthy attempt to engage in transformative Kingdom ethics. See Glen Harold Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, ILL: InterVarsity Press, 2003); Glen H. Stassen, *Living the Sermon on the Mount: A Practical Hope for Grace and Deliverance* (Enduring Questions in Christian Life Series. A Wiley Imprint. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006); Glen H. Stassen, *A Thicker Jesus: Incarnational Discipleship in a Secular Age* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012). Cf. Stassen’s Nordenhaug lectures at IBTS ‘Solid Ground: Incarnational Discipleship and Recovery of a Historically Realistic Jesus,’ 31 October-02 November 2011, published in *Baptistic Theologies* 4:2 (autumn 2012).

⁴⁷ McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1: *Ethics*, pp. 313-232, esp. pp. 214-215: ‘My claim ... The place where conscience comes to light ... the link is found in congregational reflection, discernment, discipline, and action ... (so goes my thesis) ... the concept of forgiveness as a crucial element of the communal life of Christians.’

⁴⁸ Cf. Crawford Gribben, ‘Baptists and Millennialism in Early Modern England’, in: Anthony R. Cross, Nicholas J. Wood (eds.), *Exploring Baptist Origins* (Centre For Baptist History and Heritage Studies, Vol. 1; Oxford: Regent Park College, 2010), pp. 101-120, here 101.

⁴⁹ Gribben, ‘Baptists and Millennialism in Early Modern England’, pp. 101-120, here 120.

faces of blessing and cursing, the images of loving and hating, the images of life and death. Duality is our theology's prolegomenon.

Deep analysis of common life opens our eyes for the duality of existence, and God's penetrating interventions in life. God's Kingdom entering life brings doubleness and suffering (cf. Acts 14:22). The apostle John declares that God is light, climaxing in Jesus, from creation until now, and beyond that. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:4-5, 9). The first letter of John restates: "The darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining" (1 John 2:8). Twice Scripture affirms that there is light shining (*to phōs phainei*). God's light is ever penetrating; dividing the world that is basically one.

Approaching Baptist prolegomena from the perspective of duality of life and the interventions of light fortunately has nothing static about it. Life is in flux, and light is always travelling. Life is fascinating, light is revealing. Therefore life is teaming with revelation, and this is exactly where Baptist theology should start. It follows from here that we can elaborate extensively on Kingdom suffering (the people of God throughout history), on the gift of a new conscience (from Noah to the coming of Christ, and to our times), and on the locus of baptism and communal life (moral space as communal conscience). The central idea of our theology is the precious gift of a new conscience. Conscience is what we are, individually and together. Conscience is life. We live in a moral universe. Especially the community of Jesus should understand itself as new 'moral space.'

A Tripartite Definition

My definition of doing Baptist theology holds a tripartite structure. Baptist theology is (1) communal reflection on (2) the mystery of Kingdom suffering and (3) the gift of good conscience. Approaching theology from the perspective of life and suffering, imminence and conscience, significantly contributes to avoiding the pitfalls of Docetism.

Overcoming dualism may well be the most decisive task the Church of Christ sees itself confronted with in the 21st century. Secularism pushes the Church out of public life. In what measure are Baptists still able to relate to dualities of life, ubiquitous flourishing and suffering, ubiquitous peace and fear, richness and poverty? A docetic church does not care and allows itself to be pushed away into a spiritual dream world. There are

many dualistic breaches to overcome.⁵⁰ In doing so, we have to return to the subject of Jesus and the incarnation, the Jewish Messiah and the Word of God he was. He was the King who suffered, and nonetheless he bridged many gaps and dualities of life. He related to those who were wealthy and well, and to those who were sick and poor. Jesus related to sin and justice, to destruction and peace, to hell and holiness.

According to the Lutheran thinker Dietrich Bonhoeffer the Person of Jesus was so close to fallen human nature that our Lord became the worst sinner. When Jesus was destined to become human, and entered life to be crucified, he was *peccator pessimus* (the worst sinner). Jesus was sent into the world ‘in the likeness of sinful man’ (Romans 8:3, NIV; Gr. *en homoiōmati sarkos hamartias*). Though he did not sin, Jesus came as close to sin as anybody ever had.⁵¹ Why so? In the first place because the world is God’s, and in the second place because the tragedy of dualism is only overcome by suffering. Reality is not to be divided between the devil and the Son of God.⁵² By incarnation Jesus took on the world, ‘*Diesseitigkeit*’ (thisworldliness), which however, simultaneously communicated a beyondness.⁵³ In consequence the whole Christ, God and man, was humiliated and crucified. When Jesus suffered, no part, no aspect of his very being was kept aloof from being brought into hellish agony. The Kingdom of God in this world manifests itself like its King, in humility, tenderness, and suffering. “From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force”, Jesus said.⁵⁴

Mennonite Christology

Reflecting on the incarnation, and especially on Jesus overcoming dualism by suffering, the idea of Kingdom suffering and the person of Christ are also deservingly being discussed in Mennonite Christology. Mennonites in the 16th century rejected the creed of Chalcedon because of its divisive tenets⁵⁵ (divisive as regards the person of Christ). According to Menno

⁵⁰ Glen H. Stassen, D.M. Yeager, John Howard Yoder, *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture (With a Previously Unpublished Essay by H. Richard Niebuhr)* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), pp. 213-215.

⁵¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Wer ist und wer war Jesus Christus? Seine Geschichte und sein Geheimnis* (Stundenbuch 4; Hamburg: Furche Verlag, 1962), pp. 31, 114, 116.

⁵² Ilse Tödt, Heinz Eduard Tödt, Ernst Feil, Clifford Green, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Werke*, 6. Band: *Ethik* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1992), pp. 42-51.

⁵³ Benkt-Erik Benktson, *Christus und die Religion: der Religionsbegriff bei Barth, Bonhoeffer und Tillich* (Arbeiten zur Theologie II/9; Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1967), pp. 84-85.

⁵⁴ Matt. 11:11-12. Cf. Acts 14:22; 1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6; 5:10.

⁵⁵ Cf. A. J. Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Anabaptist and Mennonite Studies; Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001), esp. ch. 24 (‘The Two Natures of Christ: reconsidering Chalcedon’), and A.J. Reimer, ‘Trinitarian Orthodoxy, Constantinianism, and Theology from a Radical Protestant Perspective’, in: S. Mark Heim (ed.), *Faith to Creed: Ecumenical*

Simons, the Chalcedonian Creed professed Jesus to be a “Christ torn into pieces”, a “*ghestuckten Christo*”.⁵⁶ Just like the Lutherans, the Mennonites wanted to proclaim one Christ, an undivided Christ, albeit completely the other way around. The Lutherans emphasized the oneness of the Lord in human flesh. The whole deity entered the world in ordinary flesh, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, Luther would say.

For Menno Simons Lutheran Christology was a sacrilege, an affront to God.⁵⁷ God intervened into the World by creating new human flesh, and by bringing forth his son as a whole new Adam. “The Word became flesh”, the apostle John says (John 1:14), so when the Father spoke, the Word took on flesh himself, without receiving it from his mother Mary, Menno maintained. By consequence, in Mennonite thinking Jesus only had a Father, not really a mother. Menno accuses Catholics and reformers alike of proclaiming a double Jesus, a compound Jesus, with on the one side a human nature, which is temporary and passible, and on the other hand a divine nature, which is eternal and impassible. So, Jesus became dualism in Person.

In a well-known *disputatio* between the reformed pastor Marten Mikron and Menno Simons held on 15th February 1554 in the North German city of Wismar, at the home of one of the ‘doopsgezinden’ (the first debate took place on 6th February), Menno made the challenging remark that one may distinguish between the person of Jesus and the nature of Jesus only if the whole Christ, God and man, be mortal and passible.⁵⁸ For Menno Christ the Lord lived and died without carrying in his innermost being a dualistic yes and no as related to the experiences of pain and suffering. However, Marten Mikron clearly admitted that for him the Lord Jesus Christ is one Person, true God and true man, without confusion of both natures and qualities. As to his human nature, Jesus was ‘passible’ (‘lijdhlick’), whereas to his divine nature the same Jesus was impassible (‘onlijdhlick’).

Interestingly and curiously though, Mennonite Christology commences with spiritualising the physical nature of Jesus. The Word took on flesh (heaven-made) with the sole objective of having the whole Christ (*totus Christus*) suffer for the sins of man. The whole suffering Christ was

Perspectives on the Affirmation of the Apostolic Faith in the Fourth Century (Faith & Order Series; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 129-161.

⁵⁶ W.F. Dankbaar, *Documenta Anabaptistica Neerlandica*, Vol. 3: *Marten Mikron, Een waerachtig verhaal der t'zamensprekinghen tusschen Menno Simons ende Martinus Mikron van der menschwerdinghe Iesu Christi* (1556), (Kerkhistorische Bijdragen 10/3; Leiden: Brill, 1981), p. 149.

⁵⁷ Dankbaar, *Documenta Anabaptistica Neerlandica*, Vol. 3, pp. 74, 95.

⁵⁸ ‘Ick sta wel toe, dat dar onderscheid is tusschen persoon ende natuer: mer ick zeg dat de gansche Christus zy God ende mensch, staerfflijk ende lijdhlick’, Dankbaar, *Documenta Anabaptistica Neerlandica*, Vol. 3, p. 106.

needed, because sin and evil were tough. Consequently, God could not use the flesh of Mary. Ordinary human flesh was too feeble for providing life and grace for new humanity. So the flesh of Mary was not crucified (in her Son), but the flesh of heaven was, says Menno. Neither did Jesus come into the world in the flesh of his mother, but he came as heavenly human.

Accordingly, God truly came to the world. As such there is no difference between the heavenly Word, the earthly Christ, and the Lord of the Church (again: *totus Christus*). God even prepared a new human body, a new creation, mainly for the purpose of suffering. Melchiorite-Mennonite Christology is not to be seen and judged as a simple lapse into docetism or monophysitism, but merely as an argument for the true suffering of Christ. Moreover, Melchiorite-Mennonite Christology may even be credited for underlining the particularity of Jesus' human existence as a Jew, living in Israel, under the Jewish law. As the new Adam, the supreme head of new humanity, Jesus' Jewishness was definitely part and parcel of the content of Christ-centred revelation.⁵⁹ God the Father wanted this particular Jew, this suffering Jew, to become the new head of mankind.

Jesus' Jewish Humanity

Now, in spite of its awkwardness General Baptists did find something appealing in Melchiorite-Mennonite Christology.⁶⁰ Anabaptists not only paved the way for Baptists as a precursory persecuted community, but also doctrinally.⁶¹ Baptists appreciate the exemplary perspective on the life of Jesus, as the divine mirror and command for Christians to live up to. The Melchiorite-Mennonite Jesus showed perfection of moral life, and total obedience. Jesus was the perfect *exemplar Domini*, the final Jew who obeyed and fulfilled the law in its specifics by committing himself completely to the Father's will. The perfect man was not superimposed on history as an empty angelic apparition, but as a male Jew, accurately coinciding with Israel's history, liturgy, and expectations. He was Israel's Messiah, purposefully prepared by heaven.

As the Mennonite scholar John Howard Yoder repeatedly stated, the Jewishness of Israel's Messiah did not only determine the setting of his life

⁵⁹ See Robbert Adrianus Veen, 'Geest en Woord in mennist perspectief', in: R. Brouwer (ed.), *Die gesproken heeft door de profeten over de geest* (Kampen: Kok, 2006), pp. 107-115, here 109.

⁶⁰ See Stephen R. Holmes, 'The Dangers of Just Reading the Bible: Orthodoxy and Christology', in: Anthony R. Cross, Nicholas J. Wood (eds.), *Exploring Baptist Origins* (Centre For Baptist History and Heritage Studies, Vol. 1; Oxford: Regent Park College, 2010), pp. 123-137, see here 127 and 129.

⁶¹ Ian M. Randall, *Communities of Conviction: Baptist Beginnings in Europe* (European Baptist Federation; Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2009), p. 11: "the main ideas held by many Anabaptists were also ideas that in the sixteenth century were to characterise the early Baptists". Generally, though, General Baptists in the 17th century rejected the Mennonite idea of Christ not taking his flesh from the Virgin Mary; see Randall, *Communities of Conviction*, pp. 21, 23-26.

and work, but also the identity of the early Christian church.⁶² The church is a Messianic community, qualified by the *Missio Dei*, and henceforth by Kingdom suffering and non-violence. However, the body of the people of Israel and the ever increasing gentile body of the Christian church regrettably failed to understand the historic momentum of the situation, and turned their backs on each other, in due time resulting in a tragic parting of the ways throughout most of the Mediterranean world.

Yet, despite the breaches, both bodies are called to participate in the *Missio Dei*, and in Kingdom suffering. Election means being called to approach the Most High God, to become a Kingdom family, and accordingly to suffer for the sake of God's *Heilsgeschichte* with humankind.⁶³ The family of God is the body of priestly saints destined to suffer the most from God's direct and indirect involvement in the course of world history. The church and Israel are placed right in the centre of God's active justice, brought about in concealment, and even more so in the open. Being elected as sons and daughters makes the family of God into a circle of trust which is actively and effectively brought into the fiery rule of his justice, the mysterious rule of his *iustitia distributiva* and his *iustitia vindicativa*, the implementation of reward and punishment, not only for the future, but also here and now.⁶⁴

This brings us again to the Jewishness of Jesus, to the Jewishness of Jews, and to some lingering questions about Baptists doing theology, Baptists as related to Kingdom suffering and to the powers of expelling the ghosts of ecclesial docetism. When it comes to theological reflection on the Jewishness of Jesus, the Jewishness of Jews, and the Jewishness of the church, Baptist theology generally fails to give in-depth answers. We have many good things to say about communal identity, conviction and living local theology, but almost nothing about Kingdom suffering and being victimized because of our Jewish and Christian identity, whether we are gentile Christian or not. Amazingly enough, most of our theological books keep silent about the parting of the ways of Jews and Christians, and about the necessity to restore relations in our time, and to find new ways of mutual *ressourcement* and of shared tradition. From a theological point of view our Baptist tradition has no intrinsic concern with the Jewish people as a suffering people. I am not aware of any solid books of Baptist scholars rethinking the *Shoah*. Jews just do not turn up in most of the narratives

⁶² See John Howard Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* [eds, Michael G. Cartwright, Peter Ochs] (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁶³ See A. van de Beek, *De kring om de Messias. Israël als volk van de lijdende Heer* (Spreken over God 1,2; Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2002), pp. 77-144, 153.

⁶⁴ Cf. Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms, Drawn Principally From Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), pp. 166-167.

safely kept in our Baptist heritage about covenanting. Of course, as always there are some exceptions and I am aware of them.⁶⁵

Obviously further explanation of the subject matter is necessary with regard to the detrimental consequences of ill-founded docetism. Kingdom suffering becomes an illusion if Jesus is cut off from his Jewish embeddedness. The fraud is persistent and obstinate, and churches should do their best to develop new attitudes of relating to the sources and to the Jewish people throughout the ages.

New Attitudes

Over the past few decades there has been a dramatic and unprecedented shift in Jewish-Christian relations, including signs of a new, improved Christian attitude toward Jews. Some of the leading names involved in the new conversations are Michael Wyschogrod, David Novak, Peter Ochs, David Fox Sandmel, Mark S. Kinzer, and R. Kendall Soulen. In 1996 Soulen published his book on Israel's God and Christianity, titled *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*.⁶⁶

In this short but thought-provoking book Soulen tries to find a sound way of Biblical theological reasoning about the faith of Israel encompassing the faith of Jesus and the faith of the Church. God's covenant and economy with Israel and creation is to be seen as the wide scope of world history being brought to consummation by God's blessing and providence. Within this broad scope, God also acts as Redeemer, coming to Israel and the world in Jesus Christ and the Gospel. The economy of consummation and the economy of redemption together constitute, as it were, a bipolar 'soul' in the depths of history by which it continually moves to its meaning and goal. However, the church is only a provisional form of the relationship of Jew and gentile, of Israel and the nations, as it will be in the far future. Anyway, Jewish people do not have to lose their Jewish identity markers in order to become part of the fellowship of the redeemed. Soulen thoroughly rejects the supersessionist design of most of our Western ecclesial thinking.

⁶⁵ See Parush R. Parushev, 'Baptists and Jews and Judaism' in: John H.Y. Briggs (ed.), *A Dictionary of European Baptist Life and Thought* (Studies in Baptist History and Thought, Vol. 33; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), pp. 275-278, esp. the bibliographic list, with only a few Baptist titles; cf. Parush R. Parushev, 'Jews and Christians after the Shoah: Christian theological perspectives on the future of the Jewish-Christian relationship,' in Věra Tydlitátová and Alena Hanzová, eds., *Reflections on Anti-Semitism: Anti-Semitism in historical and anthropological perspectives* (Plzeň, CZ: Fakulta Filozofická Západočeské Univerzity v Plzni, 2008), 35-44. Parushev's forthcoming book *Living the Vision: The Churches Getting Bulgaria to Rescue All Its Jews* (Baylor University Press) may offer a new Kingdom guided Baptist perspective on the relationship with the Jews after the Shoah as fully mutually respected peoples of God.

⁶⁶ R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). For a full discussion of Soulen's book and ideas, see the review of Jeroen Bol at http://www.whitefield.nl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=380&Itemid=54

After centuries of mutual suspicion and hostility Christianity should freshly be described from a Jewish perspective, resulting in a Jewish theology of Christianity as well as in a Christian theology of Judaism.⁶⁷ In Jewish-Christian dialogue both traditions should be recognized as ‘branches of the olive tree’, without disqualifying the one or the other.⁶⁸

Very insightful, even groundbreaking, are the pioneering inquiries Mark S. Kinzer makes in his important book *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement With the Jewish People* (2005).⁶⁹ Kinzer is President Emeritus of the Messianic Jewish Theological Institute in Los Angeles. Kinzer raises the possibility of the apostle Paul paradoxically understanding Israel’s temporary unbelief in Jesus as a participation in Jesus’ vicarious suffering (Romans 9-11). Kinzer also concludes that according to New Testament teaching the Church did not replace Israel, but contains at its core a portion of Israel (the remnant), which must truly live as Israel, exemplary in observing traditional Jewish practices, and as such sanctifying Israel as a whole.⁷⁰ For this reason Kinzer thinks that Jesus is still present among the Jewish people, though ‘in a hidden and obscure fashion’, because the church is by nature a bilateral body in solidarity with Israel. Hence, Messianic Judaism should conclusively be defined as Judaism practiced in the light of Jesus the Messiah.⁷¹

In consequence, Christianity should be marked by its openness and interest for Jewish people, especially when the church’s involvement, support, or help is needed.⁷² It is a moral duty for Christians to suffer with

⁶⁷ See David Rudolph and Joel Willits (eds.), *Introduction to Messianic Judaism: Its Ecclesial Context and Biblical Foundations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), Peter Ochs, *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), Richard Harvey, *Mapping Messianic Jewish Theology: A Constructive Approach* (Studies in Messianic Jewish Theology; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), Isaac C. Rottenberg, *Christian-Jewish Dialogue: Exploring Our Commonalities and Our Differences* (Atlanta: Hebraic Heritage Press, 2005), Michael Wyschogrod, *Abraham’s Promise; Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), Carl E. Braaten, Robert W. Jenson (eds.), *Jews and Christians: People of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Peter Ochs, David Fox Sandmel, Michael A. Signer (eds.), *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000).

⁶⁸ Cf. Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church: The Origin and Effects of Replacement Theology* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2000), Paul Charles Merkley, *Christian Attitudes Towards the State of Israel* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001).

⁶⁹ Mark S. Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism: Redefining Christian Engagement With the Jewish People* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2005). Cf. Mark S. Kinzer, *Israel’s Messiah and the People of God: A Vision for Messianic Jewish Covenant Fidelity* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011).

⁷⁰ Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism*, pp. 129-137.

⁷¹ Kinzer, *Post-Missionary Messianic Judaism*, pp. 165-177, 233, and Mark S. Kinzer, Jennifer M. Rosner (eds.), *Israel’s Messiah and the People of God: A Vision For Messianic Jewish Covenant Fidelity* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2011), pp. 24-25.

⁷² See for example Parush R. Parushev, ‘The Rescue of Bulgarian Jews from Shoah’, Part 1: ‘Redemptive Memories and Public Actions’, *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 8/3 (2008), pp. 40-51; ‘The Rescue of Bulgarian Jews from Shoah’, Part 2: ‘A Case for Authentic Christian Communal Ethics’, *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 9/1 (2008), pp. 40-49; ‘Some Theological Reflections on Christian

the Jewish people whenever and wherever Jews are victimized for being Jews, whenever and wherever Jews are forced to “un-Jew” themselves, to become what they are not. Flavius Josephus describes the Jewish nation as a people of calamity and drama. At the beginning of his account of the Jewish War Josephus writes: “Indeed, in my opinion, the misfortunes of all nations since the world began fall short of those of the Jews”.⁷³ The people of Israel, quite unfortunately, have always been a people of controversy and tragedy, because the sheer existence of Jews, their lifestyle, their faith, and their extravagance so often provoked the powers that be. More so, constant accusations, harassments and persecutions directed against Jewish people, including the *Shoah*, more than ever brought to the fore that human morality is as thin as ice. The history of the Jewish people is a *testimonium paupertatis* of Western human morality, not of the Jews, but of the nations and the gentile churches. As John K. Roth writes, “No event did more than the Holocaust to show that humanity has been duped by morality”.⁷⁴

Noachic Expectation

From Genesis 9 on gentiles were called by God to take part in a covenant, the covenant of Noah. As referred to already,⁷⁵ the specifics of this covenant have traditionally been summarized as the universal law of the gentiles, six negative commandments and one positive.⁷⁶ So even the gentiles had a law, almost from the beginning of the birth of the nations. After the fall, this was the first ‘contract’⁷⁷ of God with the world and all

Antisemitism’, *Annual of Bulgarian Evangelical Theological Institute* (2008), pp. 81-114; ‘Bulgarian Church Protection of Jews in World War II’, *East-West Church & Ministry Report* 17/4 (2009), pp. 1-3; Parush R. Parushev, “Embodied Visions: On antisemitism and the resilience of Goodness,” in Zbyněk Tarant, Věra Tydlitátová et al., *Faces of Hatred: Contemporary Antisemitism in its Historical Context*, (Plzeň, CZ: Západočeská univerzita v Plzni, 2012), pp. 7-44.

⁷³ Flavius Josephus, *Bellum Judaicum* 1,12, in: H.St.J. Thackeray, *Josephus*, Vol. 2: *The Jewish War I-III* (LCL 203; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927, 1989), p. 9.

⁷⁴ John K. Roth, *Ethics During and After the Holocaust: In the Shadow of Birkenau* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), p. 115. Cf. Darrell J. Fasching, *Narrative Theology After Auschwitz: From Alienation to Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), and Inga Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). See also the oeuvre of Hannah Arendt.

⁷⁵ Cf. page 30 above.

⁷⁶ The six negatives are: no idols, no cursing of God, no murder, no theft, no incest, no maltreatment of animals (Gen. 9:2-6). The one positive is: install government for the sake of justice (Gen. 9:6: ‘by man shall his blood be shed’. Cf. Jochanan H.A. van Wijnhoven, ‘Convert, Conversion’, in: Arthur A. Cohen, Paul Mendes-Flohr (eds.), *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought: Original Essays on Critical Concepts, Movements, and Beliefs* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1987), pp. 101-105, here 103: ‘Gentiles living in accordance with natural law were seen as having covenanted with God according to Noah’s covenant.’

⁷⁷ In Gen. 6:18 (‘But I will establish my covenant with you [= Noah]’) the Hebrew word *b’rît* is mentioned for the first time in the Hebrew Bible. In ch. 9 *b’rît* occurs 7 times: ‘Behold, I establish my covenant with you’ (9:9), ‘I establish my covenant with you’ (9:11), ‘This is the sign of the covenant which I make with between me and you and every living creature that it with you, for all future generations’ (9:12), ‘a sign of the covenant between me and the earth’ (9:13), ‘my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh’ (9:15), ‘the everlasting covenant between God

there is, animals and humans, visually established in the sky by the symbol of the rainbow (Genesis 6:18; 9:8-17).⁷⁸ All people on the globe, gentiles as well as Jews, were unilaterally covenanted by God's initiative. Henceforth, also the gentiles were called by Jesus to be part of the church.⁷⁹ They are God's people too and have moral obligations to fulfil. The rainbow shines for them too, on every place of the earth, whatever language or colour they have.

Within the boundaries of the people of Israel gentiles had to respect the faith of the Jewish people and to obey the Noachic commandments, whilst the Jews were obliged to fulfil many more. Obeying the commandments gentiles were to live as 'guests and strangers' among the Israelites (*gerîm w^etôš^ebîm*). This is how strangers were welcomed in Israel, and this is also how gentiles were received within the Jewish nucleus surrounding Israel's Messiah.⁸⁰ They were free to come, yet were expected to obey the commandments of Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20). Gentile Christians were also commanded by the apostle Paul not to elevate themselves above the Jewish people. "It is not thou that bearest the root, but the root thee", Paul writes (Romans 11:18, cf. verse 20). Gentiles were covenanted with the God of Israel by grace and love, but not without the mediation of Israel's elect (Romans 11:28),⁸¹ for salvation is from the Jews (John 6:22; cf. Rom. 3:2; 9:4-5 and Eph. 2:12).⁸²

The Jewish people, from the days of Noah until now, should be considered as forerunners of creation, forerunners of morality, and forerunners of suffering. The Jewish remnant of the Kingdom of God, in which the Christian gentiles have gracefully been inserted, is to be seen as the community of the suffering Messiah, running after new creation and new conscience.⁸³

and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth' (9:16), 'the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth' (9:17).

⁷⁸ See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Word Biblical Commentary 1; Waco: Word Books, 1987), p. 175.

⁷⁹ Cf. Acts 15:20, and Rev. 4:3 ('round the throne was a rainbow'), 10:1 ('with a rainbow over his head'). From Genesis 9 to Revelation 10 the Noachic covenant embraces history.

⁸⁰ Cf. Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Von Elend und Heimsuchung der Theologie. Prolegomenon zur Dogmatik* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1988).

⁸¹ Concerning Paul, the Romans, and the New Perspective esp. see Douglas Harink, *Paul Among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003), and Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

⁸² In Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces* the covenanting principle is extensively elaborated, see pp. 17, 21, 35, 40, 42, 56, 57-61, 75, and 86, 254, 259. On page 56 the covenant of Noah is also referred to.

⁸³ Cf. Schürer, Vermes, Millar and Black (eds.), *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, pp. 547-549.

Expelling the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

To be as close to sin as possible is the Church's calling, as Christ was the embodiment of Israel's suffering remnant. The church of gentile converts was inserted into the Jewish remnant, which embraced the Kingdom and its incarnate Messiah, and received the gift of grace, forgiveness, and good conscience.

In order to expel the ghost of Christmas yet to come, Baptist churches have to reach back to the sources of their faith, in the first place to the Scriptures, and from there to the earliest baptistic documents. The ghost of Christmas yet to come is the ghost of ultimate invisibility, because the church may end up with receiving 'another Jesus' and 'a different spirit, which you have not received' (2 Corinthians 11:4). If a Baptist community is to be a tangible Church, it should expel the apparitions of docetism, and cast out the ghost of Christmas yet to come. It should turn back to its roots, to the re-enactment of the story of Jesus' suffering as the Jewish Messiah. It should return to its major vision of Kingdom suffering and covenanted Messianic catholicity. The idea of this type of catholicity opens our eyes to the wonder of the church of Jews and gentiles, gracefully covered by the rainbow covenant (the Noachic covenant).

Moreover, it also opens our eyes to the most important truth of these series of articles, that dualism is only overcome by suffering. Yes, only suffering enables us to engage in the brokenness of life, and to channel the Kingdom of God.

General conclusion

The ghost of Christmas past was a ghost of early docetism, popping up in the bosom of the Early Church, estranging Jesus from his Jewishness, and estranging the church from its roots. Docetism is a spirituality of suspicion, a philosophy of division, dividing up the world in light and darkness, and making Jesus into an angelic apparition. The history of salvation is absorbed into spiritual 'selfhood,' leaving historical 'sameness' cut down to mere emptiness. Expelling this ghost of historical emptiness implies taking into account the importance of Jesus' Jewishness and the church's messianic catholicity.

The ghost of Christmas present is a ghost of civil invisibility, making the church into a fun factory of personal salvation, lacking social involvement. The covenant of Noah is eternal and invites Christians to have confidence in God's strategy and providence in ushering in social and civic renewal. Expelling this ghost of social irrelevance means involvement in socio-political issues and complexities, which transforms the church into a body of Christians who live their faith, that is, who pray for the needy

and the public authorities responsible, and who also sustain new developments for care and provision. Early Constantinianism delivers an interesting, yet controversial example.

The ghost of Christmas yet to come is the ghost of ultimate invisibility, the spirit of a different Jesus (2 Corinthians 11:4), unrecognizable as the Jewish Messiah who suffered for the sins of humankind. Expelling the ghost of Christmas yet to come requires turning back to the story of Jesus' suffering as the Jewish Messiah (and to the complex relation between Christians and Jews), and re-enacting that story (so, coming close to attack and sin, and in spite of that keeping a good conscience through forgiveness). Truly dualism (the realm of God vis-à-vis the realm of humankind) is only overcome by suffering.

‘Tristitia est mihi magna et continuus dolor cordi meo’

Paul of Tarsus in Romans 9:2